

# Voices: Chasing us

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Through the dark woods, the little boy ran.

As fast as his skinny legs would take him, he ran. Through the gullies and up the hills, across the streams and over the fields, he breathlessly scurried on.

His heart beat faster and faster.

Fear raced through him like a freight train. He dared only once to glance back at the giant, vicious predator. The bear was closing on the lad, his fierce growls of hunger growing louder as he pursued his tiny prey.

The boy finally reached the place of no return — and no escape.

He was cornered.

The little boy closed his eyes tightly. The bear leaped on him from behind and gave a menacing final growl.

Chased — and caught.

Then, just as suddenly, the bear released the little boy from his powerful grasp. The boy squirmed out and jumped to his feet and turned to face the bear. The boy giggled and ran into the bear's strong limbs.

"I love you, Daddy!" he gleefully exclaimed.

Hugging him tightly, the dad smiled and whispered, "I love you too, Son." Taking the boy's little hand in his, the father walked his son out of the bedroom.

Game over.

# Our persistent Father

How comforting to know that the menacing bear you imagine pursuing you is really your loving father. Your unfounded fear melts away in the warm embrace of the one who would never harm you because he loves you more than you'll ever know.

After all, he's your father.

When Francis Thompson first published his iconic poem, "The Hound of Heaven," many readers were at first startled at the metaphor of God as a relentlessly pursuing animal. But when studied and understood, the comparison pulsates with a passionate beauty. The poem is the story of God's determined persistence in the face of our stubborn and foolish resistance.

We try to run and hide, but we can't.

God chases us "down the nights and down the days ... down the arches of the years ...." We continually flee "from this tremendous Lover," Thompson writes. Until, in time and circumstance, God corners us with his love. And we surrender, not into the grip of a ravenous hound, but into the arms of a compassionate and merciful God, who loved us all along.

After all, He's our Father.

# Our loving Father

When Jesus first addressed the Almighty Creator of the universe, shrouded in sovereign, inscrutable mystery, as "Our Father," the Jews were unaccustomed to such deistic intimacy. Nor were the gods of other religions any more approachable.

People perceived a menacing bear, a hungry hound, perhaps, but not “Our Father.”

Still, Jesus pressed the analogy.

“You fathers,” Jesus said, “if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more* will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” (Luke 11:11-13, emphasis added).

We all want to be good parents. Most of us believe we are, whatever else we may be. Is not God our Father capable of being so much more to those who commit themselves to his care?

That’s the point Jesus is making, not only in his Sermon on the Mount but throughout his teaching and his stories, throughout his brief life on this earth: God is our merciful and loving Father. Yes, he will punish us, he will correct us, he will test us and he will teach us.

The one thing God will never do is hate us.

Why then do we so often fear him and flee from him? Why are we tempted in our sorrow and pain and suffering to see God as a cruel, vindictive or, at best, indifferent Sovereign?

## **Our perfect Father**

The truth is, God is too kind to ever be cruel — and too wise to ever make a mistake.

The mistake is ours when we blame him And when we doubt him.

God loves you and me perfectly. John tells us that “there no fear in love; but

perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18).

John wraps up our relationship with God into the arms of the divine, loving nature: “We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. *God is love*, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” (1 John 4:16, emphasis added).

This is much more than a lovely esoteric concept; it is a life-altering reality for the one who believes.

The Bible is nothing more — and nothing less — than the story of our Father’s abiding presence, his faithful provision and his unfailing protection. The essence of its panoramic display, cover to cover, is the Father’s unchanging, unconditional and endless love.

C. S. Lewis, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, consistently portrays the lion Aslan, the Christ figure, as neither tame nor safe but always good.

I don’t know why God should love me. I truly don’t. But I know he does, despite my occasional misgivings. It is his nature to love me. As Paul reminded Timothy, “He cannot deny who he is.” (2 Timothy 2:13).

After all, he is my Father.

“God is love.” Here is the summation of his nature.

In this central, undeniable and incontrovertible truth is our hope — both now and forever.

He’s our “tremendous Lover.”

He doesn’t stop chasing us.

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