

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CURRENT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

We are interpreters by nature. From our earliest moments on earth, we begin framing and forming our interpretive matrix. This matrix will grow throughout our lives as we interpret experiences, relationships, and even our ideas about God based on how we have interpreted life so far. Unless and until something significant occurs to reshape the basic framework of our interpretive matrix, we will continue interpreting based on how we have interpreted.

The primary influences on how we understand and relate to God are our relationships with our parents. They are the first people we encounter who interact with us. They are the first to respond to our needs and to provide us safety and nourishment. They are the first people to display emotion in our lives and to respond to our actions and emotions. They are the ones who teach us about trust, love, and relationships.

To understand what influence our parents have been on the relationship you have with God today, use the inventories on the following pages. We will have you start with your current thoughts and emotions about God.

The left-hand column is a list of characteristics for you to read through. Beside each characteristic are six other columns for you to use to mark as you turn each characteristic into a question: How much do I really believe that God is gentle? How much do I really believe that God personally leads me? To what level do I really believe that God is unpredictable? Mark your choice with a check mark (✓).

There are no right or wrong answers. This is entirely personal; your thoughts and emotions are your thoughts and emotions. Be as open and honest as you can. Don't answer with what you think you're supposed to think or feel; no "Sunday School" answers, okay? These exercises are a way for us to identify how clear or clogged your interpretive matrix is when it comes to how you understand and relate to God.

So, describe how your relationship with God really is, not how you think it ought to be. And don't be fearful that God will be angry if you put down something negative. Philippians 4:6 informs us that God desires for us to be open and honest with Him. After all, He already knows full well what we think and feel about Him and everything else as well.

We will call this the GOD inventory. Use check marks (✓) to mark your responses to the question, "To what degree do I believe that God is..."

CHARACTERISTIC	ALWAYS	VERY OFTEN	SOMETIMES	HARDLY EVER	NEVER	DON'T KNOW
Gentle						
Kind						
Disapproving						
Distant						
Angry						
Caring						
Demanding						
Wise						
Stern						
Trustworthy						
Harsh						
Gracious						
Impatient						
Aloof						
Close/Warm						
Provider						
Unreasonable						
Wise						
Unpredictable						
Strong						
Holy						
Tender/Cherishing						
Leader						
Good						
Just						
Sympathetic						
Passive						
Protective						
Discipliner						
Encouraging						
Forgiving						
Cruel						
Forgiving						

We will call this the FATHER inventory. Use and "x" to mark your responses to the question, "To what degree do I believe that my father is..."

CHARACTERISTIC	ALWAYS	VERY OFTEN	SOMETIMES	HARDLY EVER	NEVER	DON'T KNOW
Gentle						
Kind						
Disapproving						
Distant						
Angry						
Caring						
Demanding						
Wise						
Stern						
Trustworthy						
Harsh						
Gracious						
Impatient						
Aloof						
Close/Warm						
Provider						
Unreasonable						
Wise						
Unpredictable						
Strong						
Holy						
Tender/Cherishing						
Leader						
Good						
Just						
Sympathetic						
Passive						
Protective						
Discipliner						
Encouraging						
Forgiving						
Cruel						
Forgiving						

Transfer all of the check marks (✓) from the GOD inventory to the SHADED columns. Transfer all of the "x" marks from the FATHER inventory to the WHITE columns.

CHARACTERISTIC	ALWAYS	VERY OFTEN	SOMETIMES	HARDLY EVER	NEVER	DON'T KNOW
Gentle						
Kind						
Disapproving						
Distant						
Angry						
Caring						
Demanding						
Wise						
Stern						
Trustworthy						
Harsh						
Gracious						
Impatient						
Aloof						
Close/Warm						
Provider						
Unreasonable						
Wise						
Unpredictable						
Strong						
Holy						
Tender/Cherishing						
Leader						
Good						
Just						
Sympathetic						
Passive						
Protective						
Discipliner						
Encouraging						
Forgiving						
Cruel						
Forgiving						

We will call this the MOTHER inventory. Use and "x" to mark your responses to the question, "To what degree do I believe that my mother is..."

CHARACTERISTIC	ALWAYS	VERY OFTEN	SOMETIMES	HARDLY EVER	NEVER	DON'T KNOW
Gentle						
Kind						
Disapproving						
Distant						
Angry						
Caring						
Demanding						
Wise						
Stern						
Trustworthy						
Harsh						
Gracious						
Impatient						
Aloof						
Close/Warm						
Provider						
Unreasonable						
Wise						
Unpredictable						
Strong						
Holy						
Tender/Cherishing						
Leader						
Good						
Just						
Sympathetic						
Passive						
Protective						
Discipliner						
Encouraging						
Forgiving						
Cruel						
Forgiving						

Transfer all of the check marks (✓) from the GOD inventory to the SHADED columns. Transfer all of the "x" marks from the MOTHER inventory to the WHITE columns.

CHARACTERISTIC	ALWAYS	VERY OFTEN	SOMETIMES	HARDLY EVER	NEVER	DON'T KNOW
Gentle						
Kind						
Disapproving						
Distant						
Angry						
Caring						
Demanding						
Wise						
Stern						
Trustworthy						
Harsh						
Gracious						
Impatient						
Aloof						
Close/Warm						
Provider						
Unreasonable						
Wise						
Unpredictable						
Strong						
Holy						
Tender/Cherishing						
Leader						
Good						
Just						
Sympathetic						
Passive						
Protective						
Discipliner						
Encouraging						
Forgiving						
Cruel						
Forgiving						

UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCES

Which characteristics matched for your father and God (your Heavenly Father)?

Which were noticeably different (two or more spaces between them)?

What stood out the most about your earthly father's influence on your relationship with your Heavenly Father?

Which characteristics matched for your mother and your Heavenly Father?

Which were noticeably different (two or more spaces between them)?

What stood out the most about your mother's influence on your relationship with your Heavenly Father?

What contrast is there, if any, between your "Sunday School" understanding of God and your real-life relationship with God?

What would you like to do about that and how do you plan to get started?

There may be things you realized during this exercise that have caused you to reassess your relationship with one or both parents. This isn't about blaming; this is about understanding. Going forward, the focus needs to be on the relationship with God more than the relationship with any other person.