

You, the LORD, are our Father.
Our Redeemer from everlasting is your name.
¹⁷Why do you cause us to wander from your ways, LORD?
Why do you harden our heart so that we do not fear you?
Return for the sake of your servants,
the tribes that are your heritage.
^{64:1}Oh, that you would rip open the heavens and come down.
Mountains then would quake because of your presence.
²As fire ignites stubble and as fire makes water boil,
make your name known to your adversaries.
Then nations would quake in your presence.
³You did amazing things that we did not expect.
You came down. Mountains quaked because of your presence.
⁴From ancient times no one has heard.
No ear understood.
No eye has seen any god except you,
who goes into action for the one who waits for him.
⁵You meet anyone who joyfully practices righteousness,
who remembers you by walking in your ways!
But you were angry because we sinned.
We have remained in our sins for a long time.
Can we still be saved?
⁶All of us have become like something unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth.
All of us have withered like a leaf,
and our guilt carries us away like the wind.
⁷There is no one who calls on your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of you.
So you hid your face from us.
You made us melt by the power of our guilt.
⁸But now, LORD, you are our father.
We are the clay, and you are our potter.
All of us are the work of your hand. (Isaiah 63:16b, 17, 64:1-8)

Know the Lord Your Father

A child wants to know dad. She wants to have a better idea of why he does what he does. She wants to know what his plans are for the family, for her, for himself. At times she is tempted to think she knows better or more than dad. Other times she finds herself hoping dad doesn't know too much. She wants to know dad to have a relationship with him. Some have bad dads. But even then I think he wants to know what dad is doing or why he did it.

As God's children, we too want to know our heavenly Father. Speaking on our behalf, Isaiah is wrestling with some things as he looks at the world around him. He sees God's children, the people of Judah, who are determined to do what they want no matter how many times God warns them. He looks at the world and he sees much the same. You are dealing with something similar in your own life. We look at the world and we might go to our heavenly Father and simply want to know why. Sometimes it's in a sinful accusatory way—Father, you aren't doing the right thing! Lord, forgive us. Other times, we are like Isaiah and simply want to understand better. Why, Father, do you continue to let these things happen? Why do you let the wicked prosper and cheaters get by with it? Why don't do you something about all those who stain your gift of marriage? What about those who have so little regard for human life with their violence, murder, not helping more with those are in need? Isn't there something more you could be doing about all this sin and corruption in the world? What about those who poke fun and persecute your children, who mock prayer, who use your name to swear, curse, and lie? We see your Law. We know what you want them to do. But instead of fixing the people, it seems like it only makes things worse.

And so we cry out to our Father with Isaiah, **“Oh, that you would rip open the heavens and come down. Mountains then would quake because of your presence”** (64:1). We aren't saying we know better than you, but here's the answer, Father! Come sooner! Take us out of this wicked world. Then people will know who you are. It can seem so obvious that you might have even said, “I can't understand how someone can't believe this!” We know what God has and can do. **“From ancient times no one has heard. No ear understood. No eye has seen any god besides you, Father.”**

But for so many they can't. It shows you how corrupt that sinful nature is. From ancient times no one **can** hear, understand, see God as Father on their own. They do not hear God speaking to them. What it sounds like to them is nonsense. They do not see God in action. And so they go about life as if there isn't one. He continues to do what he wants because the only god he knows is himself so he does what he wants. She looks to serve no other god than the one she sees in the mirror so she will do what she thinks is best. The only thing they know and understand is looking out for themselves, wanting to feel better about their lives, and trying to find some validation for their existence. For so many they do not know what they are doing is wrong. They have no thoughts of coming judgment.

But rather than giving them an excuse, it only condemns. This is the way. This is the Father's plan. At the time of his choosing, he will rip open the heavens and come down. Mountains will quake. People will shake. He will make his name known. Eyes will see. Ears will hear and understand who is God and Lord of all. One day all must give an account. But threat of judgment, the law, doesn't change someone—it hardens a heart. It causes them to wander further away.

But there is hope. The Father will not only cast out. All those who joyfully live according to God's will, the Father will meet. Those who remember him by walking in his ways, they won't cower in fear but stand.

The only problem is, that's not us either. And even worse, we should know better. He's not a Father who, with a slight chuckle, says, "You little rascal," when you have done what he tells you not to do. No, Isaiah says, "**You were angry because we sinned. We have remained in our sins for a long time.**" Isaiah has to stop and think about what he is asking. We do too. If that's what happens to mountains at God's presence, what is going to happen to me who does not always joyfully follow his will but so often I do it because someone might tell me, "Good job."? What is going to happen to me who sees the path God calls me to walk, and I willingly turn down the seemingly easier path where I do what I want? And you know for yourself, this isn't a onetime thing—we have done it for a long time.

It's a good, valid question in v.7: Can we still be saved?

Because this is the reality: We have become like an unclean person. In Isaiah's day, an unclean person was not allowed into the temple courts. This was to teach them that unclean people do not belong in God's presence and are not part of the people of Judah. They were outcasts. Second-rate. They didn't belong. That's what we are, all of us. We are people who do not belong in God's presence. We are outside of his people. We do not belong. This isn't from something you have done. This is what you are from conception.

But don't try and point to the good things you have done for other people, your family, or even the church. Those righteous, good, moral actions you do in society and the eyes of people—while maybe good for them and commendable—they are the dirtiest, nastiest, useless, used garment or rag you can think of before God. God sees those actions and they are gross. If he could, one smell and he would gag. That's not even talking about the wicked things we do. These are all your righteous acts—the supposedly good things—we do to try and make up for those bad things. All of them are disgusting in God's sight. And that's probably part of the reason and actually makes them worst. We use them to cover up the past sins to ignore them or as collateral hoping that we can impress God and have his favor. When the truth really is that we can do nothing but sin by nature.

We like to think we are so strong and can take on the world and anything as long as we put our mind to it. No, we are like leaves. We wither with age. We fade with memory. We leave little lasting impression on this world. And in the end we have so little usefulness and barely enough to be good kindling in a fire. Therefore, God hides his face from us and guilt melts us. Can, how could we be saved from this coming judgment?

Our only hope and prayer is: Lord, have mercy. And with Isaiah we remind the Lord who is and what we are. **“Lord, you are our Father. We the clay. You are the potter.”** As easily as could throw us down and destroy us, he doesn’t. Instead he works to make you whole. From of old his name is Redeemer who does not abandon his servants. This was his plan from the beginning. Your sin carries with it an incredible debt. He came to pay it. The Law has obligations that need to be fulfilled. He did them. There was a weight on your conscience because of the guilt of your sin. Your Redeemer removes it. Our Redeemer from everlasting places himself within time and history not to shake us to the core but to take on flesh like yours and veins with blood like my own. Where all of us were unclean, Jesus, God from eternity and also true man, is clean. What we clay pots were missing, Jesus is perfectly whole. All our righteous acts were disgusting and filthy. God the Father sees Jesus and says, “You are my Son, whom I love, with you I well-pleased.” Jesus does not fade away, but gives up his life for the sheep on the cross to redeem, that is, buy you back from slavery to sin and the devil. He gives up his life as the ransom for many. His blood pays the price and flows over your sin-stained hands to make you clean. The Father hides his face from his own Son and forsakes Jesus on the cross so he endures the punishment of hell. Jesus melts under the power of our personal guilt. But when our Redeemer dies, he does it in the full confidence that His Father’s plan will be fulfilled. And three days later we see an empty tomb so that I know that my Redeemer lives.

And because your redeemer lives, this means no guilt in this life. You are not lost. Baptism now saves you. In those waters you rose with Jesus with a clear conscience before God. You are no longer unclean but a new creation, God’s child, saved from the destruction with peace in the coming judgment. He’s even washed the stain of sin from your righteous acts so that your Father says to you, “Well done good and faithful servant! You are my child. With you I am well-pleased.” You are the work of his hand. He will not leave or abandon you. Your Father blesses and keeps you. He does not hide his face from you. His face shines on you and he is gracious to you giving you his love you do not deserve fresh and new every morning. He does not punish as your sins deserve, but with sins forgiven, you are on God’s good side with favor and peace in this life and the next.

And so we wait. We wait for that time when our Father will rip open the heavens and send his Son again. Until that time, get to know your Father as he shows us in his Word. Share the good news that Jesus has freed us from sin and makes the Father known to us. Confess your sinfulness. Confess your total need to be saved. And with a new heart created at baptism and hands made clean in Jesus’ blood, kneel at his nail-marked feet getting ready for his return. Amen.