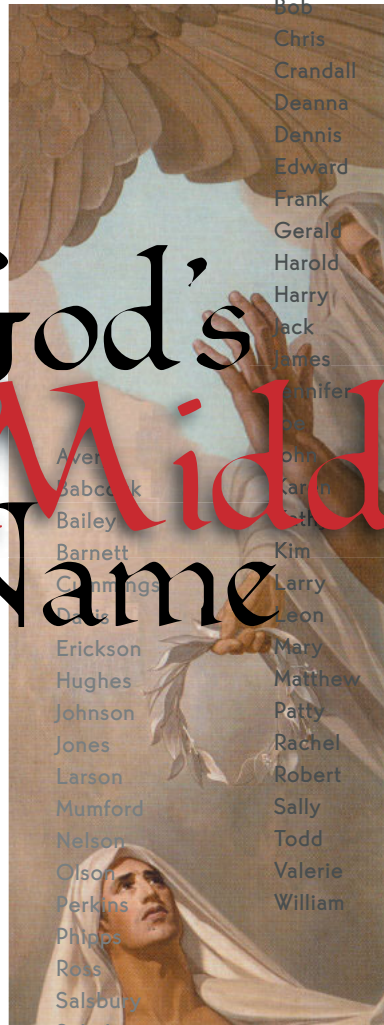


Issue #37

September 13, 2004

God's Middle Name



W

hen parents name their child they usually are filling three blank spaces.

They can do little about the last space; the family

name associates this new life with decades—sometimes centuries—of family history.

This is a name that implants heritage and continuity into every person on the family tree. The last, family name makes each person bearing that name a part of something larger than himself.

The first space in the whole name is where the parents can be creative, hoping to stamp some special identity on this new life. Here the person being named acquires something that will give him or her an often unique identity amidst the many branches of the family tree.

The middle space in the name can be used for any number of things, but very often it is used to bind this new life to a particular member of the family. It is as if the parents are saying to their child, “With our last name we attach you to the entirety of our family tree, but with this special, middle name, we associate you with a particular member of that tree.”

Thus a person’s middle name may be the first name of a dear departed cousin or aunt. It may be their grandfather’s or grandmother’s first name. Whatever the connection, the middle name is, somehow, more intimate than the others. Because it is so rarely used, it is very often known only by intimate friends and relatives. It is personal, and dear, and replete with meaning.

An Intimate Familiarity

People who know my middle name are people who cared enough to ask. They are people who have chosen to draw in closely to my life, to dig deeper and discover those things lying beneath the sur-

face. They are people for whom, when I hear *their* name, I feel something special inside.

People who know my middle name are very often people with whom I have shared intimate thoughts, deep desires and joys, and painful confessions. They care about me as I care about them. They know me in ways that will forever link us as mates—and very often link the two of us together in some eternal endeavor.

Eternity will come and go without people learning my middle name, and with little consequence. But the intimate knowledge of God’s middle name will have never-ending consequences for every person who ever drew a breath.

Do you know God’s middle name?

Yahweh

God's first name is "God the Father." It is the name that makes Him unique. It is God with a capital "G"—rather than a small "g." He is not one among many—someone small and insignificant, lost amidst the vast milieu of gods—but the *one* God. Special. Unique.

In the Old Testament, God's proper name is *Yahweh*, which is typically represented as "Lord" in contemporary translations.

God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, Lord, I did not make Myself known to them."

(Exodus 6:2-3)

To some, God the Father is distant and impersonal. He is the God of judgment and wrath; He is the one too holy for our eyes to gaze upon; He is the intimidating Ancient of Days. God's first name is His name of power and wrath. It is the name to which we call out in our despair, in the depths of our sin. It is His first name that we worship with our face to the ground, prostrate in reverent humility.

God's first name is the name that makes Him unique—it identifies Him as someone apart from anyone else. It is His name of majesty, power, and untouchable holiness.

To You, O Lord, I call;
My rock, do not be deaf to me,
For if You are silent to me,
I will become like those who
go down to the pit.
Hear the voice of my supplications
when I cry to You for help,
When I lift up my hands toward
Your holy sanctuary.

(Psalm 28:1-2)

Pneuma

God's last name is "Holy Spirit." In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24)

Spirit is *what* God is. Because God pre-dates anything or anyone else, He has no lineage, no family tree from which He emerged. But He has something very close to a lineage—He has a *type*: God is a spirit.

As a spirit, it only makes sense that when God selected someone with whom to

connect us permanently to Him, He would choose a spirit. When we take Christ as Lord—thereby entering God's family and realm—He gives us a gift. God says, *So that you will know that you now belong to Me, so that you will have access to My mind, so that others will know you are Mine—I give you My Holy Spirit.*

To many, God's last name is a mystical, mysterious thing. Many people refer to the Holy Spirit as an "it," but Jesus makes it clear that the Spirit is a "He":

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."

(John 14:16-17)

In human terms, our last name binds us to our clan. We shake hands with someone, tell them our name, and they reply, "Oh, then you're one of the Smiths from down the street," or "Didn't I have your older brother in my algebra class?"

In eternal terms, God has bound us to His clan by giving us His last name: the Holy Spirit.

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

(Titus 3:4-7)

Yeshua

The question about God's middle name has become almost rhetorical. Then again, has it? There are actually three different ways we could ask this question:

Do you know what God's middle name is?
Of course you do. By the process of elimination alone, at this point you know that we are speaking of the name of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God.

Do you know God's middle name personally? (Is He a friend?)

Chances are good, if you are reading this, that you do. Chances are good that at some point in your life you publicly declared that Jesus Christ was your Savior, brother, and friend.

Do you really know God's middle name?
Ah, now, this question might not be so easily answered.

Earlier I said that people who know my middle name are those who have cared to dig beneath the surface of my life. People who know my middle name are generally those with whom I have shared more than just a casual "hello-how-are-you" on the street. They are not just friends, but intimates.

God, in Jesus, became, for a little while, something less than Himself. While never losing the power and might and singularity of His first name—nor the essential type of His last—God took upon Himself a third, a more common name, a more touchable, intimate name.

He was saying, *I want to give you the opportunity to know Me so well that you learn My middle name. If you take the time to do that, I'll take you into My family; if you have the faith to believe that "Jesus" is My middle name, you will begin to know Me well—and we will have begun an intimate relationship.*

How many of us, however, learned God's middle name then stopped nurturing the relationship? There are people who noticed my middle initial and inquired; I told them the name it abbreviates; they smiled, said, "That's nice," then walked away, never to learn more about me.

Is that the kind of relationship you have with God's middle name? Did you care enough to learn it—maybe even remember it—but did not care enough to learn more, to really develop the relationship, to be *intimate* with Him?

But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren...

(Hebrews 2:9-11)