


# OUR BENCHMARK

by Bobby Neal Winters



As anyone who has put up vinyl siding would tell you, it is important to start off with a level, well-measured baseline. This is because if you get off by just a little at the beginning the error mounts up. Though you are off by as little as a quarter of an inch at the beginning, you get to a point where you are off by a foot. I learned that the hard way.

In teaching trigonometry students about error, I can refer to their experience in hunting or in sports. If their aim is off a little, it might not matter over a few yards, but it will over a few hundred. That is why you need to aim at the small part of the target.

The same principle is at work in life. It is easy to get off the path if we don't have our eyes firmly set on the destination. One point where it comes into play is with the Christian use of God the Father. My understanding of this has been affected by reading an essay titled, *Children of a Better God*, by S.M. Hutchens.

There is much in that essay to think about, but the change that it made in my thinking is this—when we talk of God the Father, we are thinking of God as the ideal Father. So far, so good. Yet the point is not to think of a good father and model God the Father on that person. Rather, the point is



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that God the Father is the model for parenthood in general and fatherhood in particular.

I should say at this point that the only Person who is the Way to the Father is Jesus Christ. He displayed God in his fullness. The Gospel of John goes so far as to say that it is only through the Son that we have seen the Father. Many ancient theologians, I am told, believed that all of the appearances of God in the Old Testament were

“pre-incarnate” manifestations of Jesus.

If we look at our earthly fathers and try to extrapolate the Father from them, we run into the same problem that a hunter does when he aims at a target on the far horizon, one deviation to one side or the other is magnified by the distance—and we are a long way from the Father. When we do this, we risk imagining God as some old man, weak and frail. He is far from that.

Jesus is our only roadmap. Jesus taught us; Jesus fed us; Jesus healed us; Jesus made a whip of cords and cleared the Temple. We see all of this in the Gospels. His actions provide us a lens to see the Father.

Since I own an old house, I have cause upon occasion to be a carpenter, and I will say without fear of contradiction that I am a very bad one. There is much work around my house to testify to this. I hurry too much; I am not careful; I don't plan ahead.

But, in spite of all that, I have learned a technique of measuring. If I am going to cut several boards that all need to be the same length, I first cut one board to that length, and then I use it to measure the rest. If I use it to measure the 2nd board and the 2nd board to measure the 3rd and the 3rd to measure the 4th,

the error just propagates. Using the tape would be the best way, but often I have set it down and can't find it.

Jesus is the perfectly cut board, and we are to measure ourselves against him.

I like this little analogy, but I've got a problem with it too. As we get farther and farther from Jesus during his earthly ministry, isn't it harder and harder to aim ourselves toward him? Does the gulf of 2,000 years that separates us provide too large a barrier?

It is only if we look through our earthly eyes. But Jesus told us that any time we helped someone in his name we were helping him. Jesus is still out there amongst us somewhere. He is helping and he is receiving help. We can see him by participating in this. Indeed, by participating in the actions he showed us in his name, we are participating in him. As such, Jesus is not farther and farther from us with each passing year. He is God with us in the present tense. This is mysterious, but I believe it is true. □

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