

Facilitator Notes for "Knowing God by Name"
Lesson 18 – *Father, Pater, Abba* – Luke 15:11-32

PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.

Questions

1. Even if our earthly fathers have failed us in some way, God has set within each human heart the idea of what a good father should be. Listen to your heart (and not your experience) and write a *short description* or some *descriptive phrases* that illustrate an ideal *father* figure.

Have several share their thoughts and look for similar themes and expressions. As a group, come to a consensus of 5 or 6 traits or behaviors that a good father would demonstrate.

Jesus, when he lived among his people, found that those who thought they knew who God was were often mistaken. One of his purposes in becoming human was to reveal *God the Father* to us. He did this through his loving and compassionate actions and also through his teaching. One of his favorite ways to teach was to tell a parable or a story that illustrated the point he was trying to convey. One of his stories in particular corrected the wrong image that people held of God – and, in a way that only a story can do, it revealed who God the Father truly is. This story is often called the *Parable of the Prodigal (Lost) Son*, but many Bible scholars today agree that this story has been misnamed and a more accurate title would be *The Parable of the Loving Father*. Further, because one of the definitions of *prodigal* is *reckless, extravagant giving*, this story could even be called *The Parable of the Prodigal Father!*

2. **Luke 15:1-2** sets the context for Jesus' story. What wrong concept of God was he going to correct? **The wrong concept of God that was believed by the religious leaders (and other "religious" people) was that God would not welcome, love or hang out with sinners, tax collectors, the dregs of society, non-religious types and people that others looked down on because they were not "good."** This concept of God believes that one earns and therefore deserves God's love and favor by being good, religious and following all the rules.

♥ Why is a correct concept of God important? **If our concept of God is all wrong, then our relationship will also be wrong. We will live life a certain way because we think that is what God wants, while all the while missing what really is important and what God really desires for us.** What are some of the consequences of holding a wrong concept of God for yourself and for others who are close to you? How can we learn who God really is? **We learn who his is in scripture (God must reveal who his is – there is no other way to know him) and then we must **experience** what we have learned. Head knowledge is not enough. We have to apply or live out what we learn to truly come to an understanding of who God is.**

♥ Can you think of a time when you held a wrong concept of who God is? How was it corrected?

3. Read **Luke 15:11-32**. Highlight or underline every *action* the father in this story takes as well as everything he *says*. Write some descriptive words or phrases that would seem to describe this father based on his words and actions in this story.

Answers will vary and have several share their words or phrases.

Patient, long-suffering; unconditional love; emotional; compassionate; physically and emotionally demonstrative; generous; likes to party and celebrate; kind; out-going; loving, fair; values what is really important . . .

- ♥ When we hear or read a story, we usually identify with someone in the story and experience the story through their eyes, ears and feelings. Did you identify with the **younger son**, the **older brother**, the **father** or **Jesus, the story-teller**. Why?
- ♥ If the father in this story were the only information you had about God, what would you say is God's most dominate trait? On a scale of 1-10, how closely does your concept of God match the father character in this story?

4. How, specifically, does this story disprove the wrong concept of God held by the religious leaders in **Luke 15:1-2?**

God is not a legalist but is accepting of all whom he loves regardless of their behavior or goodness. God welcomes all who come to him, regardless of where they have been or what they did. God stands, looking and watching, for the least indication of the one he loves coming to him. God is not a bookkeeper who is keeping tabs on our behavior or performance – he is not keeping a list and checking it twice to see who is naughty and nice. **God loves us for reasons other than our behavior!** God is filled with delight at the sight of a failure coming home! God does not love us for what we do, but who we are. His love for us never changes, regardless of our behavior and failures. We are God's beloved children, not because of our behavior, but because of God's heart.

- ♥ Consider again what the father does and says in this story. Which of his actions or words are most meaningful to you? Why? Which are most difficult for you to believe? Why?
 - ♥ How do you think your relationship with your parents has shaped how you view God? In what ways are your parents like and unlike the Father that Jesus portrays?
 - ♥ How have you experienced God in a way similar to the father in this story? How did it affect you?
5. In this story, Jesus portrayed the performance of the younger son to be about as bad as he could be and the performance of the older brother to be about as good as he could be. What point do you think Jesus was making about God as Father by focusing on the behavior of the two brothers?

Behavior and performance (good or bad) is not the basis of God's love for us. Our worthiness has nothing to do with God's love for us. He loves us because we belong to him and nothing will ever change that. Our performance, good or bad, cannot change God's heart toward us. God is a the loving Father, no matter what. **God's lavish love for us does not depend on us in any way!** This is simply who God is – regardless of our goodness or badness. This frees us to love God regardless of our performance or our "goodness" or "badness."

- ♥ Comparing yourself to just the two brothers in this story, who are you most like? Why? How did both sons misunderstand their father's heart? **One thought the father would NOT love him because of his performance and the other thought the father WOULD love him because of his performance.** What effect did this misunderstanding have on themselves and the relationship with their Father? **Neither was free to accept the father's lavish love or experience the loving relationship that was offered.**
 - ♥ Put yourself in the younger son's shoes (sandals!) as he looked down the road and saw his father coming towards him. What do you see on the father's face? How does it effect you? Have you ever had this same experience with God your Father? How so?
 - ♥ When have you been like the older brother, quietly resentful of God's lavishness to less deserving people? Why? When have you tried to earn, and therefore deserve, God's favor and blessing?
6. **Write a personal reflection about this story.** How does it speak to you? What desires does it create in your heart? Consider **15:31**. What has God already given you that you have not taken or received? Have you met the God of this parable? How well do you know him? From your experience, is God really like the father in this story? What wrong concept about God does Jesus' story correct for you? **Encourage several to share their thoughts and insights.**

The *Fatherhood of God* has many aspects. God is **Father** in that he created everything that exists, but *God the Father* distinguishes the first person of the Trinity from the Son and Holy Spirit. *God the Father* plays a special role within the Trinity. The relationship of Jesus the *Son to God* to *God the Father* is special and unique and is different from the role of Father that God plays in our lives. When Jesus called God *his* Father, he was claiming a special relationship to him that made him God's equal. It was for this reason the religious leaders wanted to kill him (**John 5:18; 10:30**). This is not what we mean when we call God *our* Father. God as our Father refers to the *Father-child relationship* we have with God. Just as God has given human fathers a certain role in the lives of their children, so God is to us. He loves, cares, protects, provides, disciplines and guides those who are his children. Human fathers may fail us in some

ways, but because God is perfect, he plays the role of Father in our lives perfectly! Also, human fathers by definition are male. It is important to understand that because God is our Father, does not mean he is *male*. God is not a "man" (**Numbers 23:19; Hosea 11:9**), but is a Spirit (**John 4:24**), without a body or sexual parts. *God the Father*, however, is *masculine*, and as such plays a Father-role in the lives of his children. **Note:** God contains within himself both the *masculine* and the *feminine*, for both man *and* woman were created in God's image (**Genesis 1:26-27**). In the Bible, God's love and care is also compared to that of a concerned and caring mother (**Isaiah 49:14-16; Luke 13:34**).

- ♥ Does God being your *Father* hold a positive or negative connotation for you? Why?
 - ♥ In what ways have you most experienced the fatherhood of God in your life? In what ways would you like to experience God more as a *Father*?
7. The Bible teaches that *Yahweh* is *immutable*. God does not change; he is the same yesterday, today and forever (**Psalms 102:25-27; James 1:17; Hebrews 13:8**). This means that God has always been a Father and has always had a Father's heart. Consider the following verses (in both NIV and NLT) and answer the question: Why was the *Father-parent relationship* not revealed until the New Testament era?

Galatians 4:3-5 Colossians 1:19-22 John 1:12-13 Galatians 3:26

Only in Jesus do we learn that God is our Father. Through Jesus, human beings have been welcomed into a family relationship with God the Father. All children are "children of God" by creation and receive his providential kindness (**Matthew 5:45** - *In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too.*), but sin brought a change in people necessitating rebirth and reconciliation to God which can only come through Jesus' death in our place and his resurrection life that becomes ours when we accept him by faith and become new persons in Christ. When we are reconciled to God the Father through Jesus, we receive the Spirit of adoption and can now relate to God as Abba Father (**John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Gal. 4:5**). This is why the Father-child relationship with God the Father was not possible until the New Testament era. No one come to the Father except through Jesus Christ (**John 14:6** - *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*)

- ♥ All persons are children of God by creation and receive his providential kindness (**Matthew 5:45**). Are all persons in a *Father-child relationship* with God? Why or why not (**John 14:6**)? Do you have a Father-child relationship with God? How so?
 - ♥ If you are in a Father-child relationship with God, what are some things you can expect from God your Father? We can expect that as a child of the Father, God will protect us, provide for us, love us, guide us, discipline us, train us, and have an inheritance for us. What are some things he can expect from you, his child? We can look to Jesus as an example to see how he related to his Father. He loved his Father, obeyed him, spent time alone with him, enjoyed his Presence, expressed thanks and gratitude, prayed to him and cried out to him as *Abba Father* in his darkest hour.
8. Only in Jesus do we learn that God is *our Father*. Through faith in Christ, we experience a new birth and are adopted into the family of God. As the Father of this family, God plays a specific role in the lives of his children. From the following verses, note what is given us because God is our Father.

1 John 3:1; John 16:27 -

As a Father, he lavishes love on us and his loves us because of our acceptance of Jesus his Son.

- ♥ Why does God your Father love you? If you could hear your heavenly Father speak your name right now, what tone of voice would he use?
- ♥ In what ways has God's love changed you? Have you ever resisted the Father's love? How do you accept the Father's love?

Matthew 7:11; James 1:17 -

As a Father he loves to give us good gifts – gifts that we don't earn or deserve. In fact, EVERY good thing that comes into our life is a gift from God our Father because of his love for us.

- ♥ What do you want most from your heavenly Father? What good gifts have you been given simply because the Father loves you and what good gifts have you been given because you asked for them?

Matthew 6:25-26, 31-33 -

Our Father knows everything we need to live life – food, clothing, shelter, enjoyment, etc. and he does not want us worrying about these things or chasing after them. If we put the Father-child relationship first in our lives, God our Father promises to provide everything we need to live life to the full.

- ♥ What makes you valuable to God (6:26)? How is your value and the Father's provision connected?
- ♥ What material things do you worry about the most? Why? Specifically, why are we not to worry (6:32)? Is this a good enough reason for you? Why or why not?

John 17:9, 11, 15 -

As a Father, God will protect us, his children. Jesus prayed for our protection from the world and the evil one. A good Father protects his children from danger and harm – and God our Father will do the same for us.

- ♥ From what you have learned in this course on the *Names of God*, what are some ways the Father will protect you from the evil one? Would you rather be taken out or left in the world (17:11,15)? Why?

♥ Heart Therapy

Compare your description of the idea father figure in Question 1 with what you learned about God as your Father in this lesson. What similarities or discrepancies do you see? Consider and examine any false beliefs you have held about God as Father because of a misunderstanding of Scripture or because of your own life experiences. Confess any wrong concepts of God as Father that you may hold and choose to call these false, turning away from them. Ask God to heal your heart of any wounds these wrong concepts have caused and then ask God to reveal himself to you as a loving, compassionate Father who takes great delight in his children. Ask Jesus to reveal to you the way to his Father's heart (**John 14:6**).

BELOW IS THE SUPPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURE FOR THIS LESSON THAT CAN BE PRINTED OUT FOR SMALL GROUP TIME

NIV

Luke 15:1-2 Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. **2** But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Galatians 4:3-5 So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. **4** But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, **5** to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

Colossians 1:19-22 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, **20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. **21** Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. **22** But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—

John 1:12-13 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— **13** children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

Galatians 3:26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,

1John 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

John 16:27 No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

Matthew 7:11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Matthew 6:25-26, 31-33 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ **32** For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **33** But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

John 17:9, 11, 15 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.

15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

NLT

Luke 15:1-2 Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. **2** This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such despicable people—even eating with them!

Galatians 4:3-5 And that’s the way it was with us before Christ came. We were slaves to the spiritual powers of this world. **4** But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. **5** God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.

Colossians 1:19-22 For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, **20** and by him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of his blood on the cross. **21** This includes you who were once so far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions, **22** yet now he has brought you back as his friends. He has done this through his death on the cross in his own human body. As a result, he has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

John 1:12-13 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. **13** They are reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan—this rebirth comes from God.

Galatians 3:26 So you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

1John 3:1 See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children, and we really are! But the people who belong to this world don’t know God, so they don’t understand that we are his children.

John 16:27 for the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God.

Matthew 7:11 If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

James 1:17 Whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all heaven’s lights. Unlike them, he never changes or casts shifting shadows.

Matthew 6:25-26, 31-33 “So I tell you, don’t worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn’t life consist of more than food and clothing?

26 Look at the birds. They don’t need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than they are.

31 “So don’t worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. **32** Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, **33** and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.

John 17:9, 11, 15 “My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you.

11 Now I am departing the world; I am leaving them behind and coming to you. Holy Father, keep them and care for them—all those you have given me—so that they will be united just as we are. **15** I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.