



Lesson 18 ~ Father/ Pater/ Abba

Luke 15:11-31

♥ Heart Talk

This lesson completes our studies on the *Names of God*. The *Heart Therapy* exercise for **Lesson 17** suggested that you review the names of God and set aside some time to just worship God for who he is, as revealed in these lessons. This exercise in worship can continue long after you have completed this course and it is a wonderful way to keep in your heart and mind all you have learned about God in this study. Share with your small group what you experience when you take time to consciously worship God.

Introduction

The last name of God that we will consider in this course is God as our *Father*. For this, we will have to move into the New Testament, for nowhere in the Old Testament is Yahweh called *our* Father. Even though God is identified as a Father in the Old Testament, he is not seen as a Father to individuals. Instead, he is seen as the Father of the nation Israel or the Father of all things, in that he is the creator and originator of everything that exists. We also see God's "father's heart" in the Old Testament as he cares for his people with compassion and wisdom, but the fatherhood of God is merely figurative and used as an illustration.

Not until the New Testament era do we discover the wonder of the relationship that God has planned for those who come to him in faith. Jesus shocked many of his contemporaries by referring to God as his Father and by inviting all his followers to call God, *Pater* (pa-TAIR) – the Greek word for *father* – as well as *Abba*, a familiar, intimate name meaning "Daddy" or "Papa" (**Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6**). These names unveil aspects of God's fatherly nature that were never seen before and reveal the depth of the relationship to which we are invited. Through Jesus, we have been welcomed into a family relationship with God as *our* Father.

♥ Heart Preparation

Jesus' Encouraging Words to You . . .

I am with you and for you. You face nothing alone – nothing! When you feel anxious, know that you are focusing on the visible world and leaving Me out of the picture. The remedy is simple: Fix your eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. Verbalize your trust in Me, the Living One who sees you always. I will get you safely through this day and all your days. But you can find Me only in the present. Each day is a precious gift from My Father. Receive today's gift gratefully, unwrapping it tenderly and delving into its depths. As you savor this gift, you find Me.

Jesus Calling (February 3) by Sarah Young

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently before him . . . Psalm 37:7. Continue to practice **sitting quietly before God, in silence, for 5 minutes** in order to prepare your heart to receive from God. As you sit quietly, letting your body and mind relax, imagine the peace of God creeping down over your head, your shoulders, arms, hands, legs and feet. Let God's peace fill you as you fix the eyes of your heart on Jesus.

A Prayer to Help Prepare Your Heart

*Father of my heart
I come to worship You
You created me, to bring You all the glory
Complete Your work in me
I want to be like Jesus
I call to You, Father of my heart*

Kyle Dunn and Sam Perry - 1993

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.

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?
 - ♥ Why is a correct concept of God important? 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?
 - ♥ 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.
 - ♥ 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**?

- ♥ 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?
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- ♥ 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? What effect did this misunderstanding have on themselves and the relationship with their Father?
 - ♥ 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?

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

- ♥ 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? What are some things he can expect from you, his child?
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 -

- ♥ 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 -

- ♥ 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 -

- ♥ 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 -

- ♥ 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**).