

GROWING WITH GOD: LOVE OF THE FATHER

OVERVIEW

Goal:

To foster growth in our knowledge of the Father's love and the fact that we are now his beloved sons.

Points of Emphasis:

1. The Father's love is unconditional and as unique and individual as each of us is.
2. In Jesus Christ, the Father has made us his children and adopted us into the family of God.
3. Wherever we are, Jesus wants us to go deeper into a more intimate relationship with our Father.

SESSION

Opening Prayer:

Leader: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your strength.
Deuteronomy 6:4-5

All: *Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*
Psalm 51:10

Leader: I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. *John 15:6*

All: *Speak, for your servant is listening; here I am, I come...to do your will, O my God.*
1 Samuel 3:10, Psalm 40: 7-8

Leader: Let your light shine before men...

All: *...that they may see (our) good deeds and praise (our) Father in heaven.*
Matthew 5:16

The Father's love is unconditional and as unique and individual as each of us is.

1. The love our Father has for us is very unique, as is his love for every one of his creation. For this session we want to focus on his love for you. Even though there is estimated to have been 180 billion humans in history, you are one of a kind in his eyes. *Psalm 139: 1-18*
 - His love is more than wishing good things for you. He wishes the best for you because he loves you; it is out of this personal love that his care for you flows. More than anything, he wants you to be fully you. He wants you to be the best version of yourself you can be; to find your fit and function in his great plan.

- You are made in the image and likeness of God. God loves you as a person. He loves the you that is you. The you behind your eyes. The unique and unrepeatable you. He calls each of us by name. When he says our name it contains all the love, affection and affirmation as a person that we should feel for our own sons and daughters.
Genesis 1:26-27
 - God doesn't love you because of your abilities, your talents or even your potential. He loves you as you are right now. He's moved by who you are. He does not love you because of what you can do for him, because of how many people you can help or how you can build his kingdom. He loves the you that is you. He values you.
2. God desires to share a life together. He's not distant or detached. He's involved in each of our lives, in the world he created and in what is going on. As a believer and through Jesus Christ, he is in you and you in him.
- He is not indistinct, pantheistic. He is a person; one that is unique, lovable, with thoughts, who acts, who is revealed and can be known, yet never fully known in all his thoughts, qualities and actions.
3. This relationship with our Father is what he created us for and what fulfills his love. "God is love...God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." *1 John 4:9-12*
- God's principal actions in us have been to get us to a place of love – loving him and loving one another. His love for us has been constant and has never failed.
Exodus 29: 45-46; Jeremiah 9:23-24, John 15:9-13, 1 John 4:9

In Jesus Christ, the Father has made us his children and adopted us into the family of God.

1. God's plan all along was to make us his children, with all its rights and privileges. This gift and the love it represents was freely given and needs to be freely received (read Ephesians 1:3-14). What are some of the actions of love highlighted in this passage?
- We were chosen by him before the creation of the world to be united with him. (4)
 - He always wanted and planned to adopt us to show his great love and unmerited favor to us. (5)
 - He demonstrated this by giving us his Son to bring his family together in Christ. (7)
 - He willed that his Son would freely be the sacrifice for the sins of mankind. He willed that Jesus would let himself be put to death.
 - For his part, Jesus said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you; remove this chalice from me; yet not what I will, but what you will." *Mark 14:36*
 - Both freely give their love to us so that we might be part of the family of God. This was always their intention. They call us to freely give our love and join with them in the family of God.

- Our Father seals his love with the first installment of our great inheritance – the Holy Spirit. (13)
2. When we look at the history of the world and the biblical story of its rescue, we see the Father's love cause him to take "unreasonable" actions – the incarnation, the cross and sending the Spirit to human beings.
 - Irenaeus of Lyons, an early church father, says God our Father reaches out in love with two arms: Jesus Christ, his Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 3. Continue to meditate on the Father's call to be children of God and adopted sons by reading the following passages:
 - John 1:12, Romans 8:14-16, 21; Galatians 3:26, 4:5; Ephesians 5:1; 1 John 3: 1,2; Revelations 21:7
 - (Note the Greek word for adoption to sonship in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:5 is a term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture.)

Wherever we are, Jesus wants us to go deeper into a more intimate relationship with our Father.

1. We are beloved sons of God. God wants us to move along and help us grow in power and grace to know him more and more. "This is my son in whom I'm well pleased" could be translated as, "That's my boy!" He wants to have the same relationship with us.
 - Everything changes if we know we are sons of the Most High God. We become more confident about who we are in God. We are never alone again. *Psalm 63:1-8*
 - Our prayer too can be, "Father, hear me now. I know you always hear me." This can give us great confidence! *John 11:41-42*
 - Like Jesus, our desire should be to please our Father. When we do, all of our actions begin to give glory to God. We desire to please the Father in all we do, in all our thoughts, words and deeds. *Psalm 106:47*
2. Jesus came so we might know the Father. So we might understand we are children of the Most High God and full heirs to his kingdom.
John 8:12-20, 14:6-14, 23, 28-31, 16:27-28, 17:1-5, 20-26; 20:17

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. As you read the Discussion Guide and particularly the scripture passages, what points of emphasis or insights did the Holy Spirit give you? How do they affect you in your relationship with your heavenly Father?
2. How does your relationship with your earthly father either aid or detract from your understanding of the love of your heavenly Father? If this is a problem in relating to your heavenly Father, ask your group to pray with you that you could be reconciled with your earthly father and that Jesus would be alive in you to build and renew the relationship with

your Father in heaven. Even if your father has passed on, God isn't limited by time or space.

3. What role can Jesus have in helping you deepen your relationship with our Father in heaven? Memorize John 17:26.

HOMEWORK

1. Read and mediate on "An Intimate Message from God" on the next page before the next meeting. Read John 14-17 and Matthew 5-7 and underline the word "father".
2. Review content and scriptures for "Lordship of Jesus". Throughout the next few weeks prayerfully consider the implications for you.

DISCUSSION / HOMEWORK NOTES

AN INTIMATE MESSAGE FROM GOD TO YOU

My Child ...

You may not know me, but I know everything about you. *Psalm 139:1* **I know when you sit down and when you rise up.** *Psalm 139:2* **I am familiar with all your ways.** *Psalm 139:3* **Even the very hairs on your head are numbered.** *Matthew 10:29-31* **For you were made in my image.** *Genesis 1:27* **In me you live and move and have your being.** *Acts 17:28* **For you are my offspring.** *Acts 17:28* **I knew you even before you were conceived.** *Jeremiah 1:4-5* **I chose you when I planned creation.** *Ephesians 1:11-12* **You were not a mistake, for all your days are written in my book.** *Psalm 139:15-16* **I determined the exact time of your birth and where you would live.** *Acts 17:26* **You are fearfully and wonderfully made.** *Psalm 139:14* **I knit you together in your mother's womb.** *Psalm 139:13* **And brought you forth on the day you were born.** *Psalm 71:6* **I have been misrepresented by those who don't know me.** *John 8:41-44* **I am not distant and angry, but am the complete expression of love.** *1 John 4:16* **And it is my desire to lavish my love on you.** *1 John 3:1* **Simply because you are my child and I am your Father.** *1 John 3:1* **I offer you more than your earthly father ever could.** *Matthew 7:11* **For I am the perfect father.** *Matthew 5:48* **Every good gift that you receive comes from my hand.** *James 1:17* **For I am your provider and I meet all your needs.** *Matthew 6:31-33* **My plan for your future has always been filled with hope.** *Jeremiah 29:11* **Because I love you with an everlasting love.** *Jeremiah 31:3* **My thoughts toward you are countless as the sand on the seashore.** *Psalms 139:17-18* **And I rejoice over you with singing.** *Zephaniah 3:17* **I will never stop doing good to you.** *Jeremiah 32:40* **For you are my treasured possession.** *Exodus 19:5* **I desire to establish you with all my heart and all my soul.** *Jeremiah 32:41* **And I want to show you great and marvelous things.** *Jeremiah 33:3* **If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me.** *Deuteronomy 4:29* **Delight in me and I will give you the desires of your heart.** *Psalm 37:4* **For it is I who gave you those desires.** *Philippians 2:13* **I am able to do more for you than you could possibly imagine.** *Ephesians 3:20* **For I am your greatest encourager.** *2 Thessalonians 2:16-17* **I am also the Father who comforts you in all your troubles.** *2 Corinthians 1:3-4* **When you are brokenhearted, I am close to you.** *Psalm 34:18* **As a shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart.** *Isaiah 40:11* **One day I will wipe away every tear from your eyes.** *Revelation 21:3-4* **And I'll take away all the pain you have suffered on this earth.** *Revelation 21 :3-4* **I am your Father, and I love you even as I love my son, Jesus.** *John 17:23* **For in Jesus, my love for you is revealed.** *John 17:26* **He is the exact representation of my being.** *Hebrews 1:3* **He came to demonstrate that I am for you, not against you.** *Romans 8:31* **And to tell you that I am not counting your sins.** *2 Corinthians 5:18-19* **Jesus died so that you and I could be reconciled.** *2 Corinthians 5:18-19* **His death was the ultimate expression of my love for you.** *1 John 4:10* **I gave up everything I loved that I might gain your love.** *Romans 8:31-32* **If you receive the gift of my son Jesus, you receive me.** *1 John 2:23* **And nothing will ever separate you from my love again.** *Romans 8:38-39* **Come home and I'll throw the biggest party heaven has ever seen.** *Luke 15:7* **I have always been Father, and will always be Father.** *Ephesians 3:14-15* **My question is .. Will you be my child?** *John 1:12-13* **I am waiting for you.** *Luke 15:11-32*

Love, Your Dad

Almighty God

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