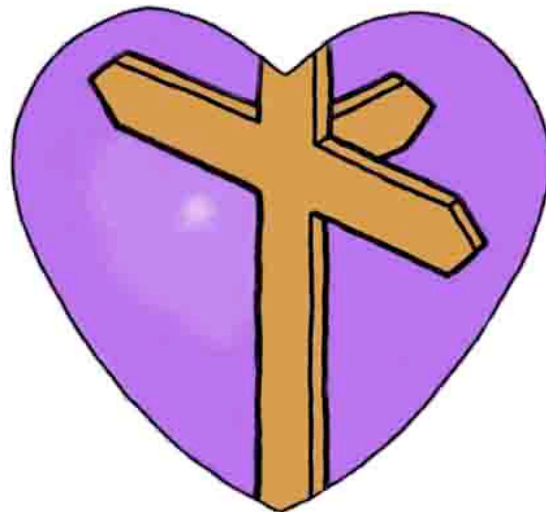


I will be a Father to you....

Knowing the Father's love, receiving the good news of Jesus, living in the power of the Spirit



Going Deeper



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I will be a Father to you....

Knowing the Father's love, receiving the good news of Jesus, living in the power of the Spirit



Going Deeper - Introduction

Our lives are constantly bombarded with facts and information. We have mobile phones, 24 hour News channels, the internet, numerous radio stations not to mention books, magazines or newspapers! Information is thrust upon us whether we like it or not!

We inevitably have to process some of this information. We have to deal with the facts that are put before us. Some of them may change or influence the way we think or feel. Our opinions may be formed, our attitudes challenged or shaped, but with all this information, with all these facts - is our heart changed?

Finding the Father and experiencing His love is not about acquiring more knowledge or being given more information. It is all about coming into a relationship with God and allowing our hearts to be changed by His love.

These notes may help you with your own journey or could be used to assist a group study. I hope they are inspirational rather than theoretical and that they help you discover the heart of a loving Father who wants to reveal Himself to you!

The notes deliberately exclude a lot of detail - that is for you to discover as you journey towards the heart of God. I have included a number of Scripture references so you can trace the chorus of the Father's love through the Bible. As you seek, I ask you to open your heart to receive what the Father wants to do in you. The gaining of knowledge and the understanding of the concepts will not change your heart; as the revelation of Father's love soaks into you then you will be changed!

May the Spirit of revelation open the eyes of your heart and may your life be touched with the Father's love.

God Has Always Been Father



In the beginning

John 1:1-8, 10-14

John 17:20-26

1 John 4:8

'In the beginning' God was in intimate relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit. They were complete in themselves. God did not need creation as an object to love because in Himself love just happens - God is love! He does not represent love - it is who He is. It is His very nature. Whatever God does He does out of love, for love and through

love.

John 17:24-26. Jesus came to introduce us to this love.

Rebellion in Heaven

Is 14:7-15

Ez 28:1-19

The story of Job

Satan was expelled from Heaven, sent from the Father's presence - he feels the full wrath of God's righteous anger. Satan wanted God's position for himself. Satan does not want God to be loving - he calls God's heart into question. Is He a God of love or is He a God of control and manipulation?



The second 'in the beginning'

Man was created in the image of God, made in perfection to model His glory. Satan watched to see how we would be formed - would we be made to obey God without choice or would we be given the free choice to love God from our heart? Satan could not prove that God's heart was bad. Satan saw that God made us in love and for love and so he attacked the jewel of creation.

What would God do when man disobeyed Him and walked his own way? Would He destroy us completely? No, He held out a way for us to return. One day there would be a way back into relationship. Our period of suffering was limited.

An act of love

Gen 3:22-24

We were driven from the garden so we would not be able to eat from the tree of life and therefore live for ever. Man had entered into a state of separation from God, but in His love, death entered the human race so that we would not live in a state of sin forever - our suffering is finite.

The Father's cry

Deut 32:5-6

Psalm 68:5

Isaiah 1:2

Jeremiah 3:19

God is by nature a Father and He keeps revealing Himself to us. He wants a family. Our sin makes it impossible for us to be reconciled to Him. He found a way for our sin to be dealt with so we could be united to Him again.

The Father's answer

John 3:16

There is hope again for mankind.

Jesus came to reveal the Father and to show us the way back to Him.

God's nature

In the Old Testament God's nature is revealed by His many names.

Elohim - Supreme God - Gen 1:1, Num 23:19, Ps 19:1

Yahweh - Lord God - Gen 2:4, Ex 6:2-3

El Elyon - God Most High - Gen 14:17, Ps 7:17, Is 14:13-14

El Roi - God who sees - Gen 16:13

El Shaddai - God Almighty - Gen 17:1, Ps 19:1

Yahweh Yoreh - God provides - Gen 22:13-14

Yahweh Nissi - God is my banner - Ex 17:15

Yahweh Shalom - God is peace - Jud 6:24

Yahweh Sabaoth - Lord of hosts - 1 Sam 1:3, Is 6:1-3

El Olam - Everlasting God - Is 40:28-31

Yahweh Shammah - The Lord is there - Ez 48:35

Jesus revealed the nature of God in one word - FATHER. The whole nature of God was summed up in this word. Jesus showed us, through his relationship with God, that He was a father. The names of God in the Old Testament were all summed up and fulfilled in that one word - **FATHER**. The nature of God was completely expressed through the life and example of Jesus.

John 1:12

John 1:14

John 5:19

John 5:30

Matt 11:27

Jesus taught us to pray 'our Father' - 'daddy'.

What is Father like?

Heb 1:3 Look at Jesus - He is the exact representation of the Father.

Ex 34:6-7 The nature of God: compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin!

1 Cor 13 Love is.... God is....

Gal 5

Gal 4:6-7 We are sons and heirs.

Jesus met people in their need. He knows what will satisfy our deepest needs. He appeals to our hearts. His yoke is not heavy and He will bring us into a place of rest. He does not deal with superficial issues, but in love, reveals the Father's heart of grace and mercy.

Finding Father

1 Cor 8:6 There is but one God the Father!

John 4:21-24 True worshippers worship **the Father** in spirit and in truth.

The revelation of Father's love goes beyond our understanding; it goes into our hearts and changes everything.

John 16:23 We have direct access to Father.

Heb 10: 19-25 We can enter the Holy place, the Father's presence.

We can come into intimate relationship with the Father. Our inheritance is available for us now. We can walk with Him as sons and daughters.

John 14:3-4

John 14:23

Pleasing Father

If we love Him - we will obey Him. Love comes first, obedience comes second! (John 14 - three times!)

The gap between our desire and our ability has to be bridged. This can only happen through the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit we know the love of the Father. We receive healing and cleansing and we learn to walk in freedom as His sons.

He is our Father

Acts 17:26, God is the one who established our times and places.

Jer 1:4-5, Ps 139:16 He made us before time and knew all about us

Heb 12:9 – He is the Father of our spirit. He conceived us way back in time. Body and soul from natural parents, but spirit from Him.

He is a father, HE IS OUR FATHER!

What does this mean?

We will know perfect love. Eph 3:16-19 "rooted and grounded in love".

We will be protected from the power of the evil one (John 17:11).

We will become one just as the Father and Son are one (John 17:20-21).

The world will know the Father (John 17:23).

GOD HAS ALWAYS BEEN FATHER AND HE WANTS TO BE A FATHER TO YOU

(2 Cor 6:18)

God's Original Plan

God's original intention

Made for His pleasure

Rev 4:11 (NLT) Everything God made was for His pleasure.

Col 1:16 All things were created by Him and for Him.

Is 43:1-7 We were created for His glory. He formed us, we are His!

God wanted a family. He walked with Adam and Eve in the garden and His desire is to walk with us too. He enjoyed their company and wants to enjoy friendship with us as well!

Made in the image of His son

Rom 8:28-29 We are predestined to the likeness of His son. Not only are we made in Jesus' likeness but we can also share his inheritance and the intimate relationship he has with the Father.

Enjoy the unity of the Trinity

The love within the Trinity is complete. Nothing is missing. This love and unity was meant to be shared with us! John 17:21

We were made by God

Gen 1 All of creation except man was spoken into being. God's word went forth and creation happened. Yet God knelt down on His knees and formed man out of the dust of the earth - He then breathed life into him. An intimate act! This demonstrates that God intended a close relationship with this part of His creation.

Gen 2:7 "God formed man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The man came alive - a living soul" (The Message).

His life came into us and gave us our life.

We have an adversary

Someone is against us. Our enemy hates the glory of God that is hidden in our hearts. He has tried to trap and destroy God's son (and failed) - we are the target now!

Is 14:7-15

Ez 28:1-9

Satan stood against God - the five "I wills"

- I will ascend to Heaven.
- I will raise my throne above God's.
- I will sit enthroned on the mount of the assembly.
- I will ascend to the top of the clouds.
- I will make myself like the Most High.

He did not want equality with God; Satan wanted God's place for himself.

Satan was thrown out of Heaven and then went after the next best thing - God's kids!

Dan 5:22

Dan 8:9-11

The fall from God's intention

Gen 3 We were tricked! "Did God really say?"

God gave Adam and Eve permission to eat from every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They could eat of the tree of life - but there is no indication that they did!

Gen 3:6 Adam was there as well! But yet he turns and blames Eve!

Separation from God

This led to separation from God. For the first time in their lives Adam and Eve feel shame - the sense of desolation and separation from God.

They clothe themselves - a basic covering to hide their shame. Yet God comes along and with compassion clothes them properly. (Gen 3:7 and Gen 3:21)

Adam and Eve receive separate identities - Woman is named 'Eve' whereas before this separation they were both known as Adam.

Two acts of love

Driven from the garden

Gen 3:22-24

Having tasted good and evil, our relationship with God, the Father, was broken. We entered into a state of brokenness and sin. However, God in His great mercy could not allow us to remain in this state forever. Adam and Eve were driven from the garden so that they could not eat of the tree of life and live for ever. If they had done so then we would have remained in this separated state for all eternity.

The Cross

The cross puts an end to our fallen state. Our broken heart can be healed and our relationship with the Father restored.

Redemption - to buy back what was once owned - how much it cost Father!

The orphan spirit

Satan, cast from God's presence, became an orphan. His spirit became barren and an emptiness fell upon him.

Our separation from God can lead to the same expression of emptiness and alone-ness, walking our own way without God.

Gen 5:1-3 Although Adam was made in the 'likeness of God', his own children were made in 'his' image as well - so we have taken on the fallen, separated nature of Adam.

Gal 5:1 Not only has an orphan spirit fallen on us but also one of slavery.

Slaves

A slave belongs to another with no rights or freedom of his own. He is owned and is accountable to another.

A slave lives for the law, lives by the law and often makes up the law to feel secure.

Everything he does is for another.

Orphans

An orphan has no identity, no rights, no inheritance.

An orphan has to succeed on his own, make his own way and make a name for himself.

An orphan strives to gain approval and acceptance.

There are many spiritual orphans in the church.

Thankfully we are not left like this...

Is 9:6 - God is "Eternal Father". It is not in His nature to let go of us!

John 14:18 - not left as orphans!

Jesus knew the goal of his journey was the cross, in order that we might be reconciled again to the Father.

Luke 15 - the parable of the lost son - a picture of our walk away from slavery and orphanness - a homecoming back to the Father.

Eph 2:3-4 we were objects of His wrath but now have been made alive with Christ. The Father's kindness has been expressed to us.

Gal 3:26 - we have become sons of God.

Eph 3:10 - a gift to take to the world.

God promised to become a 'father to the fatherless' (Ps 68:5)

One of God's names is 'Redeemer' = to regain possession of something through a payment.

Redemption has won us the right to be called sons of God (Gal 4:6-7 and Rom 8:15-16).

We can now cry Abba - 'Father' or 'Daddy'.

God is restoring His original intention to the church today so that there are many sons and daughters liberated by the power of the Spirit, who are able to carry His name and love to a hurting, loveless, fatherless generation.

As we abide in Him (John 15), live in love (1 John 4:16) and walk in love (2 John v6) then the emptiness of our hearts will be satisfied and we will become more like Jesus.

SO YOU SHOULD NOT BE LIKE COWERING, FEARFUL SLAVES. YOU SHOULD BEHAVE INSTEAD LIKE GOD'S VERY OWN CHILDREN, ADOPTED INTO HIS FAMILY - CALLING HIM "FATHER, DEAR FATHER". FOR HIS HOLY SPIRIT TELLS US WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN

Rom 8:15-16 (NLT)

I Will Be A Father To You

Generally we are born into a safe environment. Children are carefree, contained in their own world with the pressures of life far removed from them. As we grow we learn that everything is not so perfect and we build walls around us to protect us. We make our own rules about who we can trust. We develop gifts and abilities which can lead us to doing things and living life in our own strength without reference to God. We move from dependence to independence and we learn to rely on our own strength!

Adam was created as an adult in an atmosphere of perfect love, fully dependent on God. The simplicity of that relationship has been lost but the joy is: **it is ours to regain.**

The Father's cry

Deut 32:5-6

Psalm 68:5

Isaiah 1:2

Isaiah 43:1-7

Jeremiah 3:19

God is by nature a Father and He keeps revealing Himself to us. He wants a family. Our sin makes it impossible for us to be reconciled to Him. He found a way for our sin to be dealt with so we could be united to Him again.

God's heart

2 Cor 6:17-18 Come out from the ways of the world and become the sons and daughters that God intended. We can have the relationship with God that we were made for!

Is 43:6 The sons of God collected from the four corners of the earth.

Fatherhood is personal

God does not want to be distant. He is not far off and does not wave a big stick of judgment. Our experience of our own fathers can affect how we view God. Even a good father is limited by human weaknesses and inadequacies. God is not just 'Father of creation' or 'Father of all'. He is interested in a personal and intimate relationship with YOU.

Misconceptions about fatherhood:

- Fathering is a single sexual/physical act.
- A father is absent either because he is not there or is too busy to be involved.
- Fathering means domination, control, manipulation or anger.

The Bible talks about something different.

Is 63:16

Jer 3:19

2 Cor 6:18

Two words could change our understanding about the Father heart of God - He wants to be a Father **TO YOU**. That is personal!

Fatherhood is active and ongoing

Fathering is not a single act but an ongoing, lifelong process. We walk with our children and teach them about life. We help them when they are stuck, we offer advice and encouragement - we don't leave them to their own devices.

So it is with God! He wants to be a father to us in an active and ongoing way, on a day to day basis. We are not left to muddle on in our own strength. He calls us into the shelter of His wings to protect us, care for us, nurture us and lead us in His ways.

When fatherhood is not there...

Without a father we are orphans. A fatherless child has no name, no identity, no rights and no inheritance. He has to carve out an existence and identity for himself. An orphan has to succeed on his own, make his own way in life, fend for himself and gain approval through his own actions.

In all of us there may be many orphan ways. In the church there are many spiritual orphans; people who strive and who fight to retain what they have built up.

God is a father and He does not want us to be orphans. He wants to father us! An orphan heart is an empty heart and our Father wants to fill that emptiness with His love and bring us back home. Satan was removed from the Father's presence and became the ultimate orphan. Since then he has tried to infect us all with that orphan spirit.

I will not leave you as orphans

John 14:18 We are no longer orphans. Through our reconciliation with the Father, the emptiness of our hearts can be dealt with. We can again enjoy the intimacy and closeness of relationship that Adam and Eve first enjoyed. We can become a son like Jesus and an heir to the promises of scripture. Our lonely walk can be brought to an end and we can enjoy the freedom of being a son or daughter of our Heavenly Father.

This is what John 3:16 is all about.

God wants to reveal Himself to us as 'Father' and He wants to be a Father to us, day by day, in an ongoing, vital, life-giving and life-changing relationship.

A son is not like an orphan: a son has rights, an inheritance and a place in the family. A son knows that he is loved for who he is. This is a free gift, not earned because of what we do but given to us because of who we are.

Rooted and established in love

Eph 3:14-19

- We have a name that comes from the Father.
- God has unlimited riches and resources. We can therefore afford to be generous.
- We are strengthened in our inner being by the Spirit living in us - opposite of despair.
- We have power from the Holy Spirit.
- Rooted and established in love - a strong connection to the magnitude of God's love.
- Understand the width, length, height and depth of God's love:
 - Width - the complete breadth of our experience, reaches the whole world.
 - Length - our lives and into eternity.
 - Heights - the heights of celebration and elation.
 - Depth - the depths of discouragement, despair - we are never lost to God's love.

We can be so filled with this love that Jesus and the Father are seen in us.

This is what it means for God to be a Father **TO US**.

"I WILL BE A FATHER TO YOU AND YOU WILL BE MY SONS AND DAUGHTERS"

2 Cor 6:18 (NIV)

Our Journey Home to Love

Our need for love

Our lives are a journey. In fact there may be two journeys that are intertwined.

We devote our time and energy to what we do, what we achieve, what we want to become. This is the external journey, the one everybody sees - our work, our play, even our church life. On this journey we ask an important question - "Who am I?"

Then there is the second journey, perhaps more important but not so clearly seen or understood. This is the internal journey of our hearts, the place we can hear the voice of the One who gave everything for us, the voice of One who woos us into an intimate relationship. On this journey we also ask the question "Who am I?".

Each journey has the same question but the answer is very different. The answer to the external journey will not satisfy the deep longing of our hearts. We will never be able to hit the mark. We may have answers for a while but then the satisfaction drains away, leaving us searching once more.

We have to pursue the internal journey of our heart because it is only then that we find the love and security that we have been searching for.

God is love

1 John 4:1-8 God is LOVE. The complete expression of love is to be found in a person. He is not a substitute nor a counterfeit but the real thing!

Love is not one of God's attributes but it is His very nature. Everything He does is in love, with love and for love.

Love explains...

Why God creates - He creates people to love.

Why God cares - because of His love He cares for sinful people.

Why we are free to choose - He wants a loving response from us.

Why Jesus died - His love found a solution for our sin.

Why we receive eternal life - God's love never ends.

Live in love

1 John 4:16

We live in Him (John 15) and He makes His home with us. (John 14:23)

How God shows His love

Demonstrated most clearly through Jesus - John 3:16

But also demonstrated in many practical ways:

Zeph 3:17 - mighty to save, delights in us, rejoices over us with singing.

Is 40:11 - cares for us like a shepherd cares for his flock.

Rev 21:3-4 - comes to live with us, wipes the tears away from our eyes.

Ps 34:18 - close to the brokenhearted.

Ps 139:13 - created us in our mother's womb.

2 Thes 2:16 - encourages us.

Ps 139:17 - He thinks about us!

Four types of love

Agape

Rom 5:8

John 3:16

God's love is unconditional. It is freely given because God wants His family back. It is covenantal, permanent and flawless. There is nothing we can do to earn or win God's love. Nothing can be added or taken from God's love - it is complete!

Eros

The intimacy of a lover and His bride. Examples - Song of Songs, the Bride in Revelation. Society has distorted the true meaning of eros. It has led us to believe that sex will fulfil our every need for love. We look to eros to become a substitute for other loves but find that it does not satisfy our needs.

Phileo

Natural affection and kindness. The love of a friend, brother, caring neighbour. This was the way that Jesus loved Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

Storge

Family love, the love of a mother. Tenderness, provision of warmth or food. Comfort - imparted through touch, eye contact and tone of voice. If we do not receive this love in our childhood then there is a hole deep within us that needs to be filled. We often try to fill this hole with things that do not satisfy. Instead the Father wants to fill it with His love.

Our search for love

We all need unconditional love

Jer 31:3 Loved with an everlasting love. Not for what we do nor for what we achieve but for who we are.

We need to feel safe

Ps 61:1-4

Ps 32:7

Ps 27:1

We need encouragement and affirmation

Children need lots of praise to counteract criticism.

Boys need to know their dads are proud of them.

Girls need to know they are beautiful.

Col 2:2 'encouraged in heart and united in love'

A sense of meaning and purpose

Jer 29:11 God has plans for us!

God satisfies our need for love

God wants to satisfy our need for love. In fact, He is the only one who will completely satisfy the needs and desires of our hearts.

We look for love (agape, eros, phileo and storge) because we need it! God will express His love to us in these four ways because HE IS LOVE.

He will love us with His 'agape' foundational, unconditional love.

He desires to woo us into an intimate 'eros' relationship.

He will express His 'phileo' kindness and affection to us.

He will nurture, care and provide the 'storge' love we all need.

Rom 5:5 We are filled with His love by the Holy Spirit.

1 John 4:16 We live in love, not as casual visitors, but at home with love.

2 John 1:6 We walk in love.

Eph 3:16-19 We are to become rooted and grounded in love.

To have our love deficit filled, we need to keep running to Father and not to people or things. Only He will truly satisfy.

When we have it - we can give it

We need love yet we also have the ability **to** love.

If we live in the external journey of our lives we will only be able to love from a very limited reservoir - it will not meet people's needs. It will not help them answer the main question of life.

When we live in the internal journey of our hearts and have found the Father's love for ourselves we will have something to give to others.

How do we get it?

We can't strive or work for it. It is a gift of grace.

To start the journey we have to let go of 'oughts' and 'duty' and start living out of desire. Jesus showed us the way: coming like a little child, humbling ourselves, letting go of our pride and independence.

We can stop pursuing the external journey centered around self and pursue the internal journey centered on the Person who is Love.

Mat 11:28 A journey of rest in Him.

Along the way many things will try to stop us receiving the Father's love. We may need to move through pain and ask Father to heal us.

God, the Father, is waiting to lavish His perfect love on you!

HOW GREAT IS THE LOVE THAT THE FATHER HAS LAVISHED ON US, THAT WE SHOULD BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD! AND THAT IS WHAT WE ARE!

1 John 3:1 (NIV)

The Story of the Lost Son

Luke 15:11-32

The story told by Jesus about two sons who are part of their father's household.

It is a story about our hearts and the desire God has for relationship.

It is the story about our Father's extravagant love.

The younger son (rebellion)

He wanted his inheritance. He took it to go off and satisfy his own desires.

He valued his rights more than the blessings of relationship.

Under the law he could have been stoned for such rebellion but the father gave him his share of the inheritance.

In his heart he had stopped being his father's son and took control of his own life.

After a while the money ran out and eventually his 'gimme' attitude turned into 'change me'.

He decided to go back home and seek forgiveness.

THE FATHER RAN OUT TO MEET HIM!

The older son (religion)

He too received his inheritance.

He continued to work on the farm and when his brother returned he was very angry!

The apparent injustice poured out - "I've always worked hard for you, you've never given me anything!"

He was more concerned with fairness and being right than with relationship.

THE FATHER CAME OUT TO MEET HIM!

The father (relationship)

The father could have withheld the inheritance from the younger son. He could have kept him at home - but would he have kept his heart?

He let him go but we know he watched and waited until the day his son returned.

He had a robe waiting to cover his son's filth and shame - cf Gen 3:21.

He had a ring to give to his son - giving him back the family's authority.

He never stopped being a father.

Unconditional love was ready to welcome the son back into the family.

Our Heavenly Father demonstrates unconditional love and is always ready to come out and meet us!

The father in the story was lavish, extravagant and almost irresponsible with his love - just like our Heavenly Father!

The sons were slaves

The younger son was a slave to sin. In his heart, though, he knew he needed to come home. He needed to come back to the father and ask forgiveness in order to find the unconditional love which would bring his heart home.

The older son was a slave to the law. He worked for everything and judged everything by its performance. He did not know the true love of his father. He too needed to come home and find unconditional love from the father. The older son also shows us the nature of a spiritual orphan.

One loved sin, the other loved the law - what they both needed was the law of love.

The father never put them out of his heart.

Who are we like?

Do we live outside Father's house? Are we trying to earn our way in through what we do, rather than receiving the gift of relationship with Father through Jesus.

Are we like the younger son?

Are there areas of sin we need to bring to the cross?

Are we willing to humble ourselves and come back to Father, seeking forgiveness from Him?

Are we willing to lay our desires to one side and seek intimacy with Father?

There is a Father waiting for you with open arms. There is a robe and a ring waiting for you.

Are we like the older son?

Is there an emptiness in our heart that causes us to strive to find value and acceptance?

Are we judgemental and grace-less?

Do we want to be 'right'?

There is a Father waiting for you with open arms. There is a robe and a ring waiting for you.

All of us can step back inside Father's love. He always loves us. Nothing we can ever do can take us outside of His love. Rom 8:35-39.

We all need a homecoming

John 14

v1-3 There is a place prepared in Father's presence for each one of us.

v23 "My Father will love him and we will come to him and make **our home with him**"

Jesus became the way to the Father. The Father is the destination!

Jesus showed us how to be the perfect son - he lived in his Father's will and presence. He only did and said what his Father did and said. He lived to please his Father.

The Father loves us with the same love as He loves Jesus! (John 17:23).

All of us need to find our home with the Father - to receive His unconditional love that does not depend on what we may have done or not done. The emptiness of our heart can be filled with Father's love. We can lay down the striving and the struggle and find our rest in Him. Our relationship with Father can be renewed today! It is a free gift of grace.

Slaves or sons - which are we?

A slave points to a master but a son reveals a father!

IF ANYONE LOVES ME, HE WILL OBEY MY TEACHING. MY FATHER WILL LOVE HIM, AND WE WILL COME TO HIM AND MAKE OUR HOME WITH HIM.

John 14:23 (NIV)

Becoming a Son

Jesus came to show us the way to the Father, to bring us into relationship with Him, to make us sons and daughters and to give us the full inheritance planned for us.

Sadly, many in the church today miss out on this as they have not found God as their Father.

The promise of 2 Cor 6:18 is that God **will be** a Father to us.

Many instead are spiritual slaves or orphans.

(To clarify - the Bible talks about us being 'sons' and this includes us all: men and women, girls and boys! In these notes I have stayed with this pattern - but please, no-one is excluded, 'sonship' is for **all** God's children).

Slaves

A slave belongs to another, he has no rights or freedom of his own. Everything is at the bidding of another.

A slave lives by the law, lives for the law and makes the law up to justify his position.

The book of Galatians talks about us being slaves to the law and contrasts this with the freedom that is ours through the redeeming work of Jesus. We have been taken from slavery into sonship. We have died to the law in order that we can live for Christ - Gal 2:19-20.

Our inheritance is not based on the law but on the promise of sonship through Jesus. No longer do we need to live by rules as we can now live in relationship with the Father.

Orphans

An orphan has no identity, no name, no inheritance, nothing is done for him - he has to fight for everything he wants or needs.

An orphan strives to achieve or to perform, believing that this will gain him approval or value. He has a works based gospel rather than one based on relationship.

Everything he is or everything he has is a result of his own energy.

God came to be a father to the fatherless - Ps 68:5.

He promises not to leave us as orphans - John 14:18.

Sons

A son has a name, an identity, an inheritance. He always has a place in the family no matter what he does. His identity is found in being his Father's son. Sonship is a free gift.

The Father wants us to come out of slavery and our orphan ways and to become a son as Jesus was. As we experience this for ourselves we can help lead others into the same freedom.

The prodigal son came back home (Luke 15); he received a robe to cover his filth and shame and a ring to signify that his place in the family had been restored.

A son is like Jesus who only did what his Father did, who only said what his Father said and who only went where His Father told him to go.

A son experiences the Father's love. He knows his Father's pleasure.

Our identity

Jesus' identity came out of his relationship with his Father. It did not matter what he was doing - all the time he knew he was his Father's son. He was about his Father's business.

And he said to them "How is it that you had to look for me? Did you not see and know that it is necessary for me to be in my Father's house and about my Father's business". Luke 2:49 (AMP)

Sonship is central to Jesus' ministry:

Mat 3:16-17 The Father's affirmation of Jesus when he was baptised.

Mat 4:3 Satan's attack on Jesus in the wilderness.

Mat 17:1-5 The Father's affirmation on the Mount of Transfiguration.

John 19:7 The leaders' claim against Jesus.

John 3:35 Jesus was secure in who he knew he was!

Do we face an identity crisis or do we know who we are?
Have we defined our ministry with a title or a label?
Have we found the freedom available to the sons of God?

Sonship leads to freedom

Ps 119:41-48 - there is a freedom that follows our obedience to His word.

Luke 4:16-20 - Jesus came to proclaim freedom for the captives.

John 8:31-36 - the truth will set us free. A son is free and belongs to the family forever.

A slave has no permanent place in the family but the son has a place forever! That's why the prodigal could be welcomed back.

Gal 3:26-4:7 - we have been redeemed (bought back) and given the full rights of a son; we have a name, an inheritance and a relationship with Father. True freedom is sonship not slavery.

Gal 5:1 - it is for freedom that we are set free. Freedom gives us a choice!

Rom 8:12-27 - creation is waiting in eager expectation for the **sons** of God to be revealed. Sonship in us will change the world around us!

The freedom of the world leads to despair. Our freedom leads to restored relationship with the Father, wholeness and healing.

Col 3 - our freedom is ruling and reigning with Christ!

2 Cor 3:18 - the glory (presence) of God will be revealed in us in ever increasing measure.

Our destiny as sons

Eph 3:14-19

v15 (AMP) - for whom every family in heaven and on earth is named (that Father from whom all fatherhood takes its title and derives its name).

Earthly fatherhood is a copy of God's fatherhood, an imitation.

Our identity and origin come from Him.

- We have a name that comes from Him - God is in control.
- God has unlimited resources - he goes beyond our comprehension.
- Strengthened in our inner being - goes beyond despair.
- Power from the Holy Spirit.
- Rooted and established in love - a strong connection in God.
- Understand the width, length, height and depth of His love.
 - Width - covers the breadth of our experience.
 - Length - covers our lives and eternity.
 - Height - the heights of celebration and elation.
 - Depth - the depths of discouragement or despair. We are never separated from God's love.

This is the full expression of God's love and it is available to us.

BECAUSE YOU ARE SONS, GOD SENT THE SPIRIT OF HIS SON INTO OUR HEARTS, THE SPIRIT WHO CALLS OUT 'ABBA, FATHER'. SO YOU ARE NO LONGER A SLAVE BUT A SON.

Gal 4:6-7 (NIV)

Like a Child

Mat 18:1-6

Jesus has been teaching on the Kingdom of God and at this point, towards the end of his teachings, he gives us a clue to how we enter this new kingdom.

Jesus is full of surprises and this is no exception. The answer is that we need to change and become as little children!

This is very liberating! We don't have to have it all together. We don't have to be perfect. All we need to do is come to the Father like a child.

Technology and modern communications have made it possible for this generation of children to do and experience things previously impossible. Society almost makes them grow up too fast. In places like Rwanda and Burundi children have had to go through unimaginable horrors. All of these contribute to us losing a childlike spirit and heart. We quickly forget what it means to enjoy the carefree attitude of a child.

Yet Jesus calls us back to this attitude if we want to come into his Father's kingdom, back into relationship with Him. Jesus never gets us to anything that He has not already done. He had a childlike heart – He knew what it meant to be a son.

Our growing up inevitably means that we learn new skills, we become more independent and self sufficient. We lose that dependability on others.

To come with a childlike spirit means letting go of our pride. Pride is not found in the heart of God - in fact it contributed to Satan's downfall (Is 14:11-14).

That's why we have to change. This is an attitude of heart not behaviour!

What is a child like?

A child is trusting

Ps 22:9

A child simply believes that his parents will provide everything that is needed, when it is needed!

He starts life on the basis of trust!

God wants us to come to Him in the same way - simply believing Him for our needs. His character is consistent and He is completely trustworthy.

A child is dependent

A child's life is in someone else's hands. He is totally dependent on another!

As adults we try to do things on our own but God calls us to rely on Him.

Mat 6:25-33 - trust Him to provide.

A child does not plan ahead

A child does not work it out in advance! It just happens!

If God says something let it happen, let Him work it out, let Him provide, let Him lead.

A child is carefree

A child is not normally concerned with risk! He has a go and only worries about falling flat on his face when it happens!

Because our Father is so dependable and safe we can be carefree in His presence.

We can take risks of faith - the resources of Heaven are at our disposal.

1 Peter 5:7 - cast your cares on Him because He cares for you.

Ps 55:22 - cast your cares on Him - He never lets the righteous fall.

God does not want a show or a performance - He wants us to be free in His presence.

A child is innocent

An unspoilt simplicity!

Mat 10:16

We spend too much time seeking popularity, trying to impress or please others. We hide our real self behind masks and protective layers.

In Father's presence we can remove the veils. We can be ourselves!

A child needs to be loved

We were made to be loved!

God **is** LOVE. When we come to Him we come to Love - the perfect love that drives out all fear.

If we don't find real love we look for satisfaction in counterfeits.

God will never let us down because His love is perfect in every way.

1 John 3:1 - He lavishes His love on us.

A child needs his parents

He needs the love and security that parents bring.

He needs direction, discipline and provision.

He needs love, nurture and care.

Parents can be like safety nets guiding children through a difficult world, providing boundaries where necessary and releasing them when and where appropriate.

God will provide this for His children.

Children imitate their parents

Children do what their parents do!

John 6:19 - Jesus imitated his Father.

Eph 5:1 Paul encourages us to imitate God.

As we imitate Him so we take on His identity.

Children know how to rest

They race around all day and then crash out.

Jesus lived a busy and pressurised life but he knew how to rest.

He took time out with his Father just to be with Him.

His heart was at rest, so much so that he could sleep through a storm.

Ps 131 He has stilled and quieted my heart.

Mat 11:28-30 Come all who are weary - He **will** give us rest.

Heb 4:9-11 A Sabbath rest for the people of God.

We, too, can enter that rest!

Children use their imagination

They dream big dreams. Nothing is impossible in their creative minds.

They are full of imagination and creativity.

Eph 3:20-21 - God will do more than we can ask or even imagine.

1 Cor 2:9-10 - God has a big plan for us all.

Children are never satisfied

They always want more! Come back and ASK!

John 7:37-38 – If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink – if you ask streams of living water will flow!

Is 55:1 come if you are thirsty – don't need money, if you want it – come and get it! It will satisfy.

Ps 103:5 – He satisfies your desires.

Children know how to play

Children love to play - they make it happen!

Is 55:12 - go out with joy!

Mal 4:2 leap like calves released from the stall!

The Jewish nation knew how to have parties.

Being a child of God releases joy in us.

Luke 15 - joy in Heaven!

Coming to Father as a child

Let us come to our Father with a childlike attitude, simply placing our little hand in His big hand.

It is a process of laying down ourselves and finding that we are really very little and that God is BIG - VERY BIG.

To come in this way means that we have to change (Mat 18:3) - the NASB calls this a conversion.

Letting go of our pride and independence is a humbling experience but in doing so we find that we have a great big God.

A relationship like this is based on 'being' not 'doing'.

We have been trained to be strong but where is the power?

Jesus knew what it was to come with a childlike heart and his life was very powerful.

2 Cor 12:9 God's power is perfected in our weakness!

If we can let go of our 'power' and come humbly to our Father then great things can happen.

God cannot fill a closed heart. A child has an open heart and one like this can be filled with the Father's love. When we rely on Him in this way there is no limit to what He can do with us!

This is a simple, yet powerful way to live our Christian life. It is the way that Jesus not only taught, but modelled as well. He showed us the key to an intimate relationship with the Father - coming as a child!

"I lay aside my pride
I lay aside my fear as I bow my heart
Before Your throne
I will put my faith in You and
open up my heart
For Father, like a child
I want to come

And I will run into Your open, waiting arms
It's here that I am safe, for You are strong
It's here I find the truth of who I am in You
When like a child, I choose to come".

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