



OUR FATHER

Trinity Sunday

26th May 2024

Do we dare call our mysterious God, 'Father'?

Main verse:

So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. (Romans 12:15-16a)

Main Point:

No one in their right mind would argue that our God and His ways can be mysterious to us.

That's why the phrase 'God moves in mysterious ways' is so well-known.

However, while there are aspects of God which will always remain unfathomable, God invites us, as His adopted children, to draw so close to him, we call him 'Father'. What an incredible privilege it is that God invites us into such an intimate relationship!

Will we accept His invitation?

Or, due to our own fear, will we draw back preferring to keep Him at a distance? Although the way into relationship with our Heavenly Father has been made open to us, it is up to us to decide whether we'll call him, "Abba, Father".

Intro |

Well, I'm going to start my message today with a light-hearted story ...

A Kindergarten teacher was walking around the classroom observing the students while they were drawing. Stopping at the desk of one little girl who was working hard on her drawing, the teacher asked what the girl was drawing.

The girl replied, "I'm drawing God."

The teacher paused and said, "But no one knows what God looks like."

Without missing a beat, or looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, "They will in a minute."

We chuckle over such childish, naive comments, because we all know in reality how difficult it is to visualise, let alone draw, God.

I mean where would you start? What colours would you use? What background would you choose? Would you place God far off in the distance surrounded by angels, perhaps partially hidden behind the clouds? Or would He be really close, so close you could see the contours of His face? And what expression would you give Him? Would he be angry, with a stern disapproving look? Or, would He have soft, loving eyes, with wide outstretched arms?

Before you even attempt such an ambitious undertaking, you would need a fairly clear mental image from which to guide you.

But the problem is, almost as soon as you make the first stroke with your imaginary paintbrush, we come to Sundays like today - Trinity Sunday - when we are challenged to include in our portrait God's three-in-one nature – and, immediately, we feel like scrunching up our feeble attempts.

Point 1 | How is it possible to visualise or form a relationship with God Almighty? The New Testament writers tell us there is only one way.

The interesting thing is, as we read both Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus and Paul's letter to the Romans, they lead us towards visualising God in a very specific way. So specific, we are faced with a spiritual truth that God never intended us to imagine him in all his glorious majesty. Nor does He seem to want us to visualise Him esoterically, as a mysterious three-in-one being.

Even when Isaiah was given the grace to peer into the heavenlies, seeing our Holy God in His majestic splendour, Isaiah could only observe at a great distance, glimpsing only the train of God's robe which seemed to fill the whole place (Isaiah 8:1). And throughout the Old Testament, it was always from a distance that God was to be viewed – God was so holy, so majestic, He could not be approached, nor His voice heard, except at special times through intermediaries such as Moses, Abraham or certain prophets.

Then, a man appears from within the Jewish community, and begins to speak of God in a profoundly personal and intimate way. He uses a title no God-fearing Jew would ever use, calling God, *Father* (John 17:5, 11, 24; 11:41; 12:27-28; Matthew 11:25; Luke 22:42; 23:34, 46).

In many ways, it was the intimate and personal relationship that Jesus shared with His Heavenly Father, that made the religious folk so profoundly jealous and angry. They were outraged that Jesus had the audacity to use such a familiar title for God, ... that he could dare to call God, *Father* (John 5:18).

Yet the more Jesus spoke about His Father, revealing His character, His nature and His plans and purposes for humankind, the more Jesus began to invite those who believe in Him, to address *His* heavenly Father, as *their* heavenly Father (Matthew 5:45, 18:14, Mark 11:26).

And when the disciples couldn't contain themselves any longer, because they too wanted to enjoy the same intimate relationship with God that Jesus obviously shared, they asked him to teach them how to pray. And, we know, Jesus told them to speak to His Father as *Our Father* (Matthew 6:9). There are just so many wonderful verses I could share as we digest this deep truth.

Point 2 | Jesus revealed His Father's purpose for sending Him into the world was to reveal the Father, so we may be brought into the relationship Jesus shared with His heavenly Father.

One verse that always grips my heart is when Jesus prayed just before He laid down His life,

“... I am praying ... for all those who will believe in me through their message. I pray that they will be one, just as you and I are one, as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. May they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.” (John 17:20-21)

How does our relationship with our heavenly Father testify to the world that God sent Jesus?

Because what separates Christianity from all other religions is the relationship we share with our heavenly Father. Think about it. There are myriads of religions in the world today, and each uses different names for God: God of the universe, Allah, Heavenly Ruler, Eternal Spirit, Universal God

Only those who place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ, are able to call the almighty Creator God, *Father*. What a special relationship we are called into. Because we have been adopted into the family of God, we are right in the centre of the relationship between Jesus and His Father.

And it is this special privileged relationship that Paul writes about,

“you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.” For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children.” (Romans 8:15-16a also see Galatians 4:6-7)

Let us consider for a moment, this special word ‘Abba’, that leaps from our heart. Abba is the Aramaic word used by Jesus as He agonised with His heavenly Father, in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36) It is an intimate way of addressing a father, which is similar in English to ‘Daddy’ or ‘Papa’.

Think about it, only children who have a warm, trusting relationship with their father call him ‘daddy’ or ‘Papa’ – friends of the family would never use such a familiar and intimate name.

That’s why Paul chose this word. He’s saying, God’s Spirit affirms our belonging to the family of God our Father, prompting us to relate with our heavenly Father a beloved child. As a member of the Father’s family, of course, we use the intimate name for our Father, the same as Jesus used with His Father.

So far everything is sounding really good ... but let us be realistic.

Many who know and love Jesus, find addressing God in such an intimate way, extremely difficult. Some draw back in hesitancy and fear, feeling as though addressing God in such a way as somehow irreverent or inappropriate.

Some find calling God *Father*, downright offensive.

Point 3 | Our preparedness to enter into an intimate relationship with our heavenly Father, is intrinsically linked to our relationship with our earthly Father.

While I was in the process of preparing this message, Michael told me about his friend who was chaplain at a children’s orphanage. Although the chaplain deeply desired the children to grow up knowing the depth of Father God’s love for them, he had to remove the words “Our Father” from the Lord’s prayer because in the heart of every child, the image of father had been so damaged by their earthly father.

It is undeniable, there is an intrinsic connection between the relationship we had with our earthly father, with how we perceive and picture our Heavenly Father.

Even those who had loving fathers, who tried their best to provide and care for their families, will still be aware of their failures and weaknesses.

All of us, to some degree or another, look at our heavenly father, through the scratched and dirty lens of our earthly father.

So how are we to get a clear picture of the height, depth and length of Father God’s love for us?

Well, our starting point is Jesus. For Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9)

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal the Father to us, through our relationship with Jesus.

So, rather than looking at God the Father through the lens of our earthly father, we are to look at God the Father through the lens of Jesus His Son.

Application | A journey of discovering the Father heart of God is a long one

Now, the journey of discovery into experiencing the Father Heart of God is rarely completed in a 12 minute message! For most Christians it takes a lifetime.

Some of God's children undertake this journey alone with only the Holy Spirit as their travelling companion. The Holy Spirit may use tools of Biblical meditation, stepping into parables (such as The Prodigal Son) to reveal the Father's tender heart towards His children.

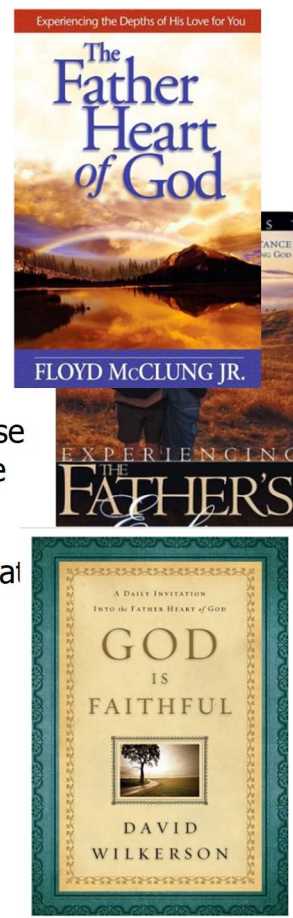
The Holy Spirit may prompt some of God's children to use books written by others who have undertaken the journey themselves. Three well-known works are:

- The Father Heart of God by Floyd McClung
- Experiencing the Father's Embrace by Jack Frost
- God is Faithful | A daily devotional into the Father Heart of God

If your experience with your earthly Father has been profoundly problematic, either involving neglect, rejection or abuse, it is wise to travel the journey of discovering what true fatherhood is like, with a trusted Christian Counsellor or those skilled in Prayer ministry. Please let me know if you would like to use one of these resources.

Regardless of which tool or resource you choose to use, I'd like to reassure you that the journey of discovering the Father Heart of God is an important one.

It is a relationship Jesus came to restore, so let us never take it for granted.



Pentecost Devotional

Walking with the Holy Spirit for Thirty Days of Spiritual Discovery

Available on website or
in Church foyer

Introduction

Part 1:

Who is The Holy Spirit?
Introducing the Holy Spirit
Knowing the Holy Spirit
The Spirit of Missions

Part 2:

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament
The Creative Spirit
The Enabling Spirit
The Prophetic Spirit

Part 3:

The Holy Spirit and Jesus
The Spirit Prepared the Way
The Spirit Empowered Jesus
Jesus Promised the Spirit
Jesus Poured Out the Spirit

Part 4:

The Holy Spirit and the Mission of God
The Holy Spirit Gives Life to the Church
The Holy Spirit Empowers Us for Mission
The Spirit Directs Us in the Mission
The Spirit Enables Us to Represent Christ
The Spirit Works in the Lives of Unbelievers

Part 5:

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit
What Is the Baptism in the Holy Spirit?
Why Every Christian Must Be Baptized in the Spirit
You Can Know You Have Been Filled
You Can Receive the Holy Spirit Today
You Can Help Others Receive the Holy Spirit

Part 6:

The Holy Spirit Helps Us
The Spirit Helps Us Pray
The Spirit Enables Our Worship
The Spirit Helps Us Understand the Bible
The Spirit Helps Us Become Like Jesus
The Spirit Encourages and Guides Us

Part 7:

Living and Ministering in the Holy Spirit
Speaking in Tongues: Its Blessing and Benefits
Ministry in the Spirit
Spirit-Anointed Preaching and Teaching
Gifts of the Spirit
Fruit of the Spirit