

God's Love: The Father Heart of God

Goals: It is the work of the Holy Spirit to reveal that we are the beloved children of God. This study is an invitation to more deeply reflect on and experience the Father's love in our lives.

Openers (Choose 1):

- Describe a time growing up (or now) when you felt especially close, loved, secure, protected or cared for by a parent, a teacher, a mentor, or any other significant person.
- When was a time someone you respect spoke highly of you in front of others? What was that like?
- Has there been a time when you sensed the love of God in a special way? Describe that time.

Scriptures:

Helpful tip - Read the Matthew text and talk about the questions relating to the Matthew text and then read the Romans text and talk about the questions relating to the Romans text.

Matthew 3:16-17 New International Version (NIV)

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Romans 8:15-16 New Living Translation (NLT)

15 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.[a] Now we call him, "Abba, Father." [b] 16 For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.

Footnotes:

8:15a Greek you received a spirit of sonship.

8:15b Abba is an Aramaic term for "father."

Digging Deeper:

Observations

Matthew 3:16-17

- What details does Matthew highlight about Jesus' baptism? (*heaven opened...the Spirit alighting on Christ...the voice of love and affirmation*)
- What might be the significance of the details Matthew chooses to highlight?
- Looking at the verses that come before verse 16, do you think anyone other than Jesus saw the Spirit, heard the voice? For whose benefit did these manifestations happen? For Jesus? The crowd?

- Explain the impact these signs would have on Jesus, on the crowd, on the audience Matthew was writing to (who were primarily people of Jewish background) (*In their case the idea of God calling someone his son might stir up images of God's anointed King—see Psalms 2*)
- What do you think might be the significance of these words being spoken to Jesus *before* Jesus had begun his ministry, before he'd healed anyone, taught anything, or done anything noteworthy in the public's eye? (*His love and affirmation was not based on what Jesus had accomplished—on his works—but solely on God's unconditional love for his son*)

Romans 8:15-16

- Does anyone know what the term “**Abba**” means? (*a term of deep respect and endearment, equivalent to “dearest dad”*)
- Looking at the text, what is the purpose of God's Spirit?
- From these verses in Romans, how would you describe the difference between a slave and a son?

Interpretations

- Reflecting on both the Matthew passage and the Romans passage together, what do you think might be one of the roles of the Spirit to be in a believer's life? (*several directions to go here, but certainly one being the Spirit reveals the Father's love in our lives...helping us to experience God as Father and experience his affirmation and embrace of us as His sons and daughters just as Jesus did at his baptism*)
- Why do you think it is so important to see oneself as a child of God...and to see God as our Beloved Father apart from anything we might do for him?
- How might experiencing God as a dear Father help to push back fear in a person's life or even Jesus' life?

Applications

- What do you think is the greatest obstacle to understanding or experiencing God as your loving Father? (To hearing his voice of love spoken over you?)
- What difference in your life do you think knowing that you are a dearly loved child of God would make (has made)?
- **Taking it a step further, could be done in a follow up 1:1:** Write a letter of affirmation in which you are writing as God. The letter is to you and in it God shares how much he cares for you, how much he likes you and is so thankful for you. Take time to read these letters out loud and then pray together inviting the Spirit to more deeply reveal God's love in your life.