



SESSION 3 PRAYING TO OUR FATHER

A 10 Session Study based around the Lord's Prayer

Drawn from material prepared by J John and the Life Builder Study series of booklets (Douglas Connelly)

All bible verses quoted are from Matthew Chapter 6 NLT

^{9a} "Our **Father** in Heaven..."

Introduction

For many, experiences of earthly fathers can be poor; a father may be absent, distant or critical. Some will have experienced violence or other forms of physical or mental abuse. If our experience is poor, we can sometimes project that experience upon God and think that is a picture of God as Father. To do so is understandable but to do so is to begin at the "wrong end of the telescope". Far better to start with the biblical picture of just how good Father God is and then view our experience in the light of that perfect example. This study is not intended as a counselling session for those with such hurts and experiences but it may help to restore a right perspective of a loving Father.

Opening Activity (Welcome)

- ❖ Have you ever found it difficult to know how best to address someone (possibly in a work situation) by e-mail or letter.
- ❖ If you met a former teacher after you left school would you feel comfortable calling them by their Christian name?
- ❖ Have you ever caught yourself doing or saying something that your parents did when you were little and you vowed you would never do. (Or do you ever look in the mirror and see one of your parents looking back at you!)

Exploration

- ❖ What good characteristics do you hope you will pass on to your children? Is there anything you would prefer to die out with you?

Study (Word)

Old Testament

Look at the following readings and decide what characteristic of God as parent they reveal

Deuteronomy 1: 29 – 31; Deuteronomy 32: 6; Psalm 91: 3 – 4; Psalm 27: 10; Psalm 68: 5; Psalm 103: 13; Proverbs 3: 12; Isaiah 49: 14 -16; Isaiah 63: 16; Isaiah 64: 8; Hosea 11: 1 – 4; Malachi 2: 10.

Are the images exclusively male or do they include some motherhood/female imagery? Remember Genesis 1 – male and female together made in the image of God

New Testament

The picture of God as Father is developed as we see the relationship Jesus has with His Father. Consider the following readings:

Mark 14: 36; Matt 11: 25 – 26; John 17: 1 -2; John 17: 25 – 26.

How would you describe Jesus relationship with God the Father?

Look at “the prodigal son” Luke 15: 11 – 32. Remember it is a story of two lost sons and a father who loves both of them.

- ❖ The younger son sells part of his father’s estate and leaves with the money. What do you think of the way he treated his father?
- ❖ What do you think would be the response in that culture to the way he behaved?
- ❖ In vv 21 – 24 what do we learn of the father’s attitude and actions towards his younger son?
- ❖ If the servants or the older son had got to the younger son before his father how do you think the story might have ended?
- ❖ How can we sometimes be like the older son towards the father?

This is the third story about something which is lost. What does it tell us about the Father’s attitude towards us?

Read John 14: 6 - 11

- ❖ What is the relationship between Jesus and the Father?
- ❖ How do we come to know the Father?
- ❖ See Romans 15: 6; 2 Cor 1: 3; 2 Cor 11: 31; Ephesians 1: 3; Colossians 1: 3; 1 Peter 1: 3. What title is given to God? How can we come to know Him? Is it possible by any means other than through Jesus?

Look at Rom 8: 14 – 17; Gal 4: 6 – 7

- ❖ We see the term Abba used in both these passages. We also see the status of Christians and of non-Christians. What is the description in each case, what are the differences between Christians and non-Christians?
- ❖ What is the work of the Holy Spirit in this process?

Think point – belonging to a family begins as a fact, feelings follow facts

Do you know that you are a child of God and He is your Father?

What difference does that make to you?

How does it affect your life?

How does it affect your view of yourself?

How does it affect your prayers?

God as Father is one particular image the bible gives us. What is the prime image that you think of first when you think about Him eg Creator, Judge, Saviour, Father, Friend, Refuge. Does this affect how you relate to Him?

Praise, prayer and worship (Worship)

Ask God to widen your understanding and vision of Him (ie to see Him using a wider set of the bible images we have rather than just one or two “favourites”)

Ask God to use the truth that He is Father to set you free

Praise God for all He has done

Use suitable songs to reinforce the message eg Father of the Fatherless, Father God I wonder

What next? (Witness)

- ❖ Do we share the family likeness of our Heavenly Father? How can we share that love with others?
- ❖ How can the fact of a loving and searching Father help those who are hungry for love?