

Chapter V: The Father-Heart Of God

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Chapter V: The Father-Heart Of God

I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters. (2Co 6:18a)

A. Introduction

This biblical truth is foundational to our understanding of how to respond to our God, our heavenly Father. 'Agape' (the sacrificial love of God), is the most powerful single force in the universe, it is this love that motivated the heart of God to reach out to us. God's love is so totally different from any human love we have ever known - it is unconditional, undeserved and absolutely perfect. We do not have to work to receive this awesome love: this is something that we as humans find so difficult to accept.

1Co 13:4-7 is a well-known passage on love. Most Bible scholars agree that the love described in this passage is not human love but the love of God. It is impossible for us to have this love-it is given to us by the Holy Spirit. It describes perfect, divine love: the love that our heavenly Father has for us, His children.

God's profound love for us is demonstrated in His choosing His only Son to die so that we, as fallen man, may have the privilege to know Him as our Father in heaven and spend eternity with Him (Mt 11 :27).

B. Why The Father-Heart Of God?

Why devote a whole section of this manual to the father- heart of God? Because God is a person, He can enter into personal relationships, of which one of the easiest for us as humans to understand is that of "father." Jesus taught those who entered the kingdom of God to regard God as their Father. He taught His disciples to address God as "our Father in heaven" (Mt 6:9). All Jesus' teaching encourages a relationship with the Father that is intimate, close, and tender. We need to understand that God as Father is the *perfect Father* - He eagerly desires that we rely on Him for:

- Care and provision in even the most practical matters of food and clothing (Mt 6:25-34).
- Protection (Mt 10:28-31).
- Provision of all good things (Mt 7:7-11).

Not all of us have had the privilege of having godly fathers. Many of our fathers have let us down in many ways on many occasions and are nowhere near perfect. Sin has destroyed countless father-child relationships to the point that they not only function sub-optimally, but in many cases, totally break down (for example, adultery, divorce, alcoholism, sexual abuse, or attitudes of disinterest).

Floyd McClung, the author of The Father Heart Of God, quotes a psychologist as reporting that "70% of all violent impulse crimes are committed by children from divorced homes or single-parent families" and that "the average parent in Europe watches television three and a half hours each day and spends thirty seconds communicating with his children."

In Genesis we see that God created both male and female in his image and so both are part of His nature and character. For a family to receive a full revelation of God's love, both father and mother are needed as they both represent unique aspects of God's character. Where there is a single-parent family, it is important to know that God can compensate for the missing love of a parent.

Because we are continually faced with imperfect father figures, our concept of what a father should be becomes distorted and we, often sub-consciously, transfer this to our relationship with God.

It is at this point that we need to consider what thoughts come to mind when we hear the word 'father.' Is it the loving, gentle, warm, forgiving, protecting, providing, doting father that Scripture reveals, or have we allowed our earthly fathers and other authority figures to veil who God really is as our Father?

Picture these situations:

- A young boy spends all afternoon carving what he believes to be a horse out of piece of wood. At the end of the day, he excitedly waits for his dad to come home to show him his handiwork. A tired, preoccupied man finally arrives and barely casts a glance in the direction of his son.
- A young teenager going out for the night with her friends looks eagerly in the direction of her father, hoping he will show some interest in her activities. All he does is reach for his wallet and ask her how much money she needs.
- A toddler's father places him on the kitchen counter and tells him to jump and he will catch him. As the little son trustingly jumps toward his father's arms, his father turns his back. Three times this happens and finally the father reveals the moral of the exercise to his son: "Son, never trust anyone!"
- A parent with no time, a parent with no interest and a parent that cannot be trusted.

We need to ask God to help us set aside our preconceptions and experiences of earthly fatherhood in order that we may relate with Him as He intended.

In the words of Floyd McClung, "Don't ever resent the failings of your human parents. They are just kids that grew up and had kids. Rather rejoice in the wonderful love of your Father God."

In God we have a *perfect Father*. We can unreservedly trust Him to always be the same: His character and attributes are both constant and consistent (Mt 5:43-45, Mt 7:9-11, Jas 1:17). Unlike the fathers in the situations above, our heavenly Father always has time for us, delights in us, longing that we will come to him not with clasped hands, but open arms and He desires us to put all our trust in Him.

Scripture continually expounds God's passionate love and goodness toward His children. 2 Co 6:18 states, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

LAYING FOUNDATIONS

C. What Motivates Us To Serve God?

Fear? Selfish gain? A desire to be successful? A need to be accepted by others. Surely if this is the motivation, we do not know God!

He is our Father, and we are His children. He first loved us (1 Jn 4:19) and in response to His divine care and protection, we need to serve and obey Him. (1Jn 5:3a) says, "This is love for God: to obey His commands."

If we know our God as Scripture reveals Him, and His love for us, His sons and daughters, then serving Him will not only come naturally, but will be a privilege. Think of how a young child looks upon his father with awe and passionately defends and boasts about his dad among his friends: "My dad's bigger than your dad," "My dad's cleverer than your dad," and so it goes on.

We need to be like children: we need to love and serve our heavenly Father simply because He loved us first. We need to seek out opportunities to boast about Him and to tell others of our love for Him.

D. Receiving God's Love For Us

We live in an "if ... then ..." society where acceptance is performance-orientated and therefore conditional. Many children believe that they are only worthy to receive the love of their parents if they receive a good report card, if they are successful in sport, or if they work hard around the house. Their concept of love is that it is conditional: if you perform, then you will be loved and accepted.

But the 'agape' love of our God is so very different-God is love (1Jn 4:16). Because He is love, His very nature means that we do not need to do anything to get Him to love us. All He desires is that we be found in His presence and receive His love. As with any love relationship, there needs to be both giving and receiving of love.

Imagine how a wife would feel if she gave her husband a tender, loving hug to express her love for him and he pulled away, asking what he could do for her. She would be totally devastated. In the same way, you want nothing in return but the other person's response of love.

What is your response to God when he tells you that he loves you? Do you tenderly receive his love, or do you anxiously and actively search for a way to earn His approval? (1Jn 3:1a) puts it this way, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"

If you have been disappointed by your natural father, soak yourself daily in scriptures that portray the qualities of your heavenly Father-for it is only truth that will set you free (Jn 8:32).

LAYING FOUNDATIONS

E. Your Father Revealed

Your real Father is waiting eagerly to reveal Himself to you; all He desires is that you ask Him.

E.1. Adopting Father

- Eph 1:4b-5a In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.
- Eph 1:11a In him we were also chosen.
- Jn 1:12-13 Yet to all who received him, to all who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, ... but born of God.
- Ro 8:15a For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship.
- Gal 4:4b-5 God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.
- 2Co 6:18a I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters.

E.2. Father To The Fatherless And Defender Of Widows

- Ps 68:5a-b A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows.
- Dt 10:18a He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow.
- Ps 146:9a The LORD ... sustains the fatherless and the widow.
- Ps 68:6a God sets the lonely in families.

E.3. Covenant-Keeping Father

- Isa 54:10 "Though the mountains be shaken, and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken, nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.
- Isa 61:8b-9 In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed.
- See also Lk 15:11-31 for the story of the prodigal son clearly depicting God's amazing love and grace in keeping covenant with His children.

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E.4. Rewarding Father

- Heb11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
- Mt6:3-4 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
- Mt10:41-42 Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.
- Mt5:12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- Eph6:7-8 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

E.5. Prayer-Answering Father

- Lk 11:9-13 So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.
- Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!
- Jas 4:2d You do not have, because you do not ask God.
- Jn 14:13-14 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.
- Jn 16:23-24 In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

E.6. Giving Father

Mt6:25-33 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ... your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Ps 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Ps 34:9-10 Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

Mt7:11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

E.7. Forgiving And Redeeming Father

1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Lk 15:21-24 The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So, they began to celebrate.

Mt6:14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

Jesus' prayer at Calvary is a dramatic demonstration of God's forgiveness!

E.8. Disciplining Father

Heb 12:7-11 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Pr 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the LORD'S discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

God's discipline as Father produces righteousness, peace and joy. Ps 66:18 indicates God's silence as His discipline. If you are not hearing God, ask yourself: Did you obey what He last said to you?

E.9. Loving Father

Jn 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

1Jn 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Jn 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

1Jn 3:6 No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

Ro 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ps 33:12-19 But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.

LAYING FOUNDATIONS



We are the "apple of His eye" (Dt 32:10, Ps 17:8, Zec 2:8), His treasured possession (Ex 19:5). At the end of the world His sons and daughters will be His inheritance: a bride (Rev 21:9-10) for His son for all eternity.

See also Lk 15:11-32 for the story of the prodigal son.