

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Knowing God as a Father



Touching base 5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

Look at the painting on the participants' notes? What kind of father do you see here? How does this remind you of God?



Understanding the information (15 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Why do we call God “Father”? An early Christian saint called Cyprian wrote this, “Those who have been born again and restored to God through grace say “Father” at the beginning of all prayer because they are already beginning to be his sons and daughters. None of us would presume to do this had not Christ himself taught us to pray in this way.”

Jewish people knew that God is neither male nor female, but spirit without body or gender. While it is common to refer to the Spirit using the masculine ‘He’ in some cases the words used are feminine or neuter. The character and action of God’s spirit is beyond any gendered ideas we might bring.

Nevertheless they understood God to have the loving qualities of a parent. Psalm 103 says, “As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.” Isaiah 49:15 “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”

When Jesus taught that we should, through Him, know God as an intimate Father this was entirely new. The most important relationships we have are our relationship with Jesus as Lord and our relationship with God as our father.



But what kind of father is God? When Jesus addressed God, he used the word “Abba”. Later on, Paul writes in Romans that we cry out to God, “Abba, Father” when we pray. A helpful translation of this word is, “Dear Father.” It is a term of intimacy and trust, but also carries a sense of obedience. The word ‘Abba’ shows that Jesus knew God as intimately involved in His life, and not distant. The writer CFD Moule says, “The intimate word conveys not a casual sort of familiarity but the deepest, most trustful reverence.”

For some people calling God Father might be difficult for various reasons, and we need to be sensitive, But, rather than abandoning the word, the writer James Bryan Smith offers some helpful advice,

“...when Jesus describes God as his father we have to let him define what fatherhood means. Barth is helpful here: it is not that there is first of all human fatherhood and then a so-called divine fatherhood, but just the reverse; true and proper fatherhood resides in God and from this fatherhood what we know as fatherhood among us is derived. The solution is not to abandon the term father but to let Jesus define it.” (From “The Good and Beautiful God”)

Discuss: How can my experience of God as Father shape how I define what human fatherhood means, rather than the other way round?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

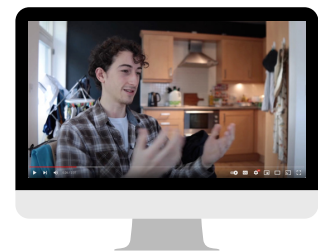
Read Isaiah 49: 13-18 which describes God’s parent heart.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFy-HN8wlnI>
What struck you as important in the video?



Responding to God’s leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, “What might God be showing me and how might I respond?” They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, “Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?”



Group prayer (5 minutes)

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be
Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me

Amen.





Knowing God as a Father

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