

Knowing God as a Loving Father

By Dr. Rhiannon Lloyd

There are many Scriptures that speak of God as Father. There are some in the Old Testament (Ps 68:5; Isa 9:6; 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:19). But most are in the New Testament because more than anyone else, Jesus is the one who introduces us to the Father. (Mt 6:6-13, 31-33; 7:11; 11:27; 13:43; Jn 4:21- 23; 14:6,16; 16:23; 20:17; Act 2:33; Ro 1:7 (and at the start of most of the epistles); Ro 8:15-17; 1Co 8:6; 2Co 1:3; 6:18; Gal 4:6-7; Eph 1:5-6, 17; 2:18; 5:20; Col 1:12; 1Th 3:13; 1Jn 3:1; Jude 1).

Jesus came from the bosom of the Father (Jn 1:18 KJV) so that He could take us back with Him into the bosom of the Father (Jn 17:24). The only place where wounded people can find healing is in the embrace of the Father. But before we can understand what is meant by a father's love, we first need to understand the needs of every human being. We were all born with certain needs that God intended our parents to take care of.

Basic Human Needs

Every human is born into the world with certain needs: physical (food, clothing, shelter, etc.), mental (education), spiritual. Everyone also has needs of the heart which are just as important as the others but often misunderstood or neglected. What are these needs?

a. Love

Everyone needs to feel they are loved. Often parents try to show love by meeting material needs, but this alone isn't enough to communicate the love God wants us to learn from our parents. There are different ways in which love needs to be communicated.

- *Through words* - Children can know they are loved by hearing words of kindness, praise and appreciation. In many cultures, however, it is difficult for parents to say, "I love you", "I'm proud of you". Either they feel embarrassed or fear they would spoil their children if they expressed their love in such ways. The absence of sweet words can have just as negative an effect as bad words (Pr 12:18; 15:4; 18:21; 28:21). God is never reluctant to say, "I love you"! We are His treasured possession (Dt7:6).
- *Through affection* - God also created us with a need to receive physical affection. Again this can be difficult in some cultures except in the case of very young children either because of embarrassment or fear of it taking on sexual connotations. This is very sad because we all need hugs.
- *Through meaningful time spent together* - A father or mother who takes time to listen to, play with, or just be with their child communicates, "You're important to me", "You are worthy of my time and attention." A message of importance and worth is communicated to a child when interest is shown to him. It is especially important for church leaders to show love to their children. Often the children get neglected because the people in church get their attention. It's hard for the child to feel important when he feels, "My father gives time to everyone but me."

- To be credible, the above expressions of love need to be backed up by the provision of the physical and mental needs.

b. *Security*

Every child needs to know the world into which they were born is a safe place to live. Quite often, children can feel insecure through:

- lack of love between their parents; when parents love one another there is peace in the home
- being abused by their parents in some way or parents making excessive demands on them
- disease or death in the family
- extreme poverty
- conflict in the family or community

Children need to know their parents are there to protect them from harm. A sense of security also comes when children know that adults in the community are making sure life is safe for them.

c. *Significance and Purpose*

Every person needs to know that their life has a purpose and value even if they are handicapped in some way. Every child needs to know they have something to contribute to the world and that the world is an enriched place because they are there; something would be missing if they weren't there. Our value is in who we are in God and not in what we do or don't do. God has a purpose for every life.

When there is conflict in a nation, society robs us of all these things.

Some people are already traumatised because of their childhood experiences even before they got exposed to a national conflict.

Lacks

Even though God planned for everyone to have their needs met, it doesn't always happen. Parents are also wounded and maybe they can't or don't know how to meet the needs of the children. Lacks in any of the above areas can damage us as much as a traumatic experience. Often we don't realise it, thinking that our lives were 'normal'. God, however, understands our need for healing.

God Wants to Give Us the Love of a Perfect Father

Even though the Scriptures tell us many things about our Father's heart and character, we can often feel fearful of Him and uncertain of His feelings towards us. Why is this?

1. Life's tragedies may suggest to us that we don't have a loving Heavenly Father. (We covered this in the last chapter.)
2. We may have received very unbalanced teaching about God's character, stressing only His holiness, His anger against sin, His judgement, etc.

3. We are influenced by our experiences with our earthly fathers. Some of us may have had very good fathers who displayed the qualities of our Heavenly Father. But this is often not the case. Because of their own hurts and needs we have had an imperfect picture of Father God through our earthly fathers. Our fathers may have been :
- not there at all (through death, or through deserting the family)
 - often not there (because they were too busy with work or too involved with their own friends and interests)
 - critical of us, expecting too much
 - unfavourably comparing us with another brother or sister
 - harsh, disciplining us very severely, often in anger
 - cruel or rejecting
 - neglecting the needs of the family (e.g. because of drunkenness)
 - not interested in us, not paying us attention
 - not able to show us love and affection
 - not speaking words of love, encouragement and praise
 - not able to provide for the family because of sickness or disability

How Can We Be Sure What Kind of Father God is?

Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 8:19, 14:7,9). He is the exact representation of the Father (Heb 1:3).

God the Father is exactly like Jesus!

What our Heavenly Father is like:

- He loves us
Jer 31:3; Jn 13:1; 16:27; Eph 5:1; 1Jn3:1
- He has compassion on us
Ps 103:13; Mt 9:36; 14:14; Lk 15:20; 2Co 1:3
- He delights in us
Ps 147:11; 149:4; Pr 8:30-31; Zep 3:17
- He cares for us
Dt 32:10-11; 1Pe 5:7
- He calls us His beloved friends
Dt 33:12; Jn 15:13-15; Jas 2:23
- He relates intimately to us and calls us by name
Job 29:4; Isa 43:1-2; Jn 10-14. 27
- He gives us constant attention
Dt 31:8; Ps 34:15; 139:16; Mt28:20
- He nurtures us
Ps 27:10; Hos 1.1:1-4
- He encourages and affirms us
Isa 41:8-13; Lk 12:32
- He is patient and gentle with us
Ps 103:8; Mt 11:29; 2Co 10:1; 1Ti 1:16; 2Pe 3.9
- He instructs and guides us
Ps 32:8; Isa 48:17; Jn 8:12; 14:26
- He provides for us
Ps 23:1; 34:9; Jn 16:24

- He enjoys giving us good gifts
Jer 32:40; Lk 11:13; Jas 1:17
- He is kind and forgiving
Ps 86:5; Jer 9:24; Mic 7:18-20; Eph 2:7; Tit 3:4-5
- He disciplines us in a good way because He loves us
Jer 46:28; Heb 12:5-11

But what about His anger, doesn't the Bible speak about God's anger?

God highly values what He has lovingly created. His anger is directed against the wickedness and evil that interferes with His creation knowing His love. His anger was seen only when His covenant was despised and violated. It's the jealous anger of a Father who dearly loves and highly values His children. Even in Judgement God's intention is to cause us to turn back to Him so that once again He can take us into His loving embrace.

On the Cross, God poured all His anger onto Jesus. All who avail themselves of Jesus' sacrifice and enter into the New Covenant are shown mercy (Jn 3:16) God does not take pleasure in the death of anyone (Eze 18:30-32; 2Pe 3:9). But if they reject His mercy, they themselves choose death rather than life, and it grieves His heart.

For those who are God's dear children, God's anger is not directed at us, but at the things that would destroy us. He will fight against anything (within or outside us) that will mar our relationship with Him because we are so important to Him. That's not something for us to fear but to welcome. It simply shows how much He loves us. Romans 8:35-39 tells us that nothing can separate us from His love.

God's Love is Everlasting

You can't stop yourself being loved, but you can cut yourself off from God's love.

Jer 31:3 His love is everlasting. There's nothing you can or can't do to alter God's love for you. This is grace. All God's anger was poured out on Jesus on the Cross.

On a cloudy, overcast day, the weather is often grey, rainy and miserable underneath the clouds. It is often cold because there is no sunshine to brighten and warm the day. If this continues day after day, one might start to wonder if the sun had disappeared. If you were to get into an aeroplane and fly above the clouds, you would find the sun is still there! The clouds can't stop it from shining, but they can stop people on the ground from receiving its warmth and brightness. The clouds are like sin and unbelief in a person's life. The sun is God's love. This love doesn't stop shining, but sin and unbelief in our lives stops it from reaching us. It is unbelief in God's love for us that stops us from receiving such love.

What did God feel when He saw you beginning to grow in the womb? Do you believe that when God looked at you He was very pleased with what He had made? You were precious to God long before you were born. He wasn't comparing you to anyone else. He didn't want you to be exactly like anyone else because you can demonstrate some aspect of the glory of God which no one else can. He knew sin would mar His creation but He sent Jesus to take away our sin (ps 139:15-16; Jer 1:5; Isa 49:1).

Personal Application

Make a list of the attributes of a perfect father. Allow yourself to dream a bit. What kind of fathering would you have liked to have received? What is your heart crying out for?

Consider your experiences with your earthly father. How has this influenced your heart's view of who God is?

How has it influenced your ability to give and receive love to your own family (spouse, children, siblings, parents, friends, etc.)?

"I will be a Father to you" (2Co 6:18)

God wants to make up to us for anything that we lacked in our human experience. God says, "I want to be your Father. Whatever you lacked, I want to make it up to you. If no-one ever said 'I love you, I'm proud of you', I want to tell you these things." Discovering the wonderful heart of our perfect Heavenly Father heals our wounds. He is the best Father we can ever imagine. He also gives us a mother's love (Ps 27:10; Isa 49:15-16; Isa 66:13).

No one needs to feel disadvantaged because of imperfect parenting. We need to forgive our parents for every way they were unable to meet our needs, and then come to the only One who can! Our Heavenly Father can fill the empty hole inside. He can more than make up for all we lacked.

The sad thing is that if we have lacked in a certain area of our lives, it becomes an area of unbelief preventing us from coming to the Heavenly Father. For example, if our earthly father never comforted us, it's hard to believe God when He says, "I am He who comforts you" (Isa 51:12), It never even occurs to us to go to Him for comfort, because we are used to doing without, or trying to meet our need for comfort in other ways.

Personal Application

Take time to study the Scriptural references in the appendix on 'How valuable we are to God'. You are about to embark on a wonderful journey of discovery of your Father's love! Open your heart to your Heavenly Father who is waiting to give you a big hug. Receive from Him all His promises of restoration of the things you lacked.

Show the same love you are receiving from the Father to those who are close to you. Remember:

Reconciliation begins at home !