

:: summary

The word “father” is a word that instantly conjures up all kinds of images, feelings and memories based on your life experience. For many of us, thinking about or relating to God as our heavenly father is a challenge because of the shortcomings and failures of the father figures we have experienced. Thankfully, God is not like human fathers – He loves unconditionally, He is perfectly good and just, He is always trustworthy, He never fails, never tires, and although He is Lord of the universe, He wants us to know Him as the dad we always wanted.

:: discussion

Because God uses human imagery to help us know what He is like and how He wants to relate to us, we tend to make the mistake of projecting human flaws onto God, which only distorts our perception of who He truly is. Often, our conclusions about what God is like and how He feels about us are based on the way parental figures did or didn't relate to us as children and adults, leading us to common misconceptions like God is distant, angry or an oppressive tyrant.

How has your experience with or the absence of parental figures influenced the way you have related to God over the course of your life?

Read Mark 14:32-36

In the garden of Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed to God as Father using the special term *Abba* (ah-bah), which is translated “father” and carries a relational intimacy that had never been applied to God before. This term expresses relational warmth and closeness in the Aramaic language, and is used by children of all ages to address a parent the way a child would call out in the night after a bad dream or an adult child might greet a beloved parent after being apart for a long time.

What does the name *Abba* demonstrate about Jesus' unique relationship with God, and what might Jesus be teaching us through the way he relates with God?

Read Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:6-7

By accepting God's grace in Jesus, we are made sons and daughters who can call God *Abba*, Father. The ultimate expression of adoption is to be made an heir, claimed by a father as a legitimate child worthy of an inheritance. Though our relationship with God is not the *same* as Jesus', it is *like* his relationship with the Father because we get to share in His intimacy with the Father, who has made us co-heirs with Jesus. As heirs, we will enjoy eternity with God the Father in heaven as our inheritance.

Does this context for the term *Abba* change the way you relate to God as Father? How so?

Read Matthew 6:9-10

This prayer Jesus teaches us affirms the character of God the Father as the first person of the Trinity, and demonstrates the way we can come before God as Father, with the boldness and loving reverence of a child.

How could you apply the same boldness and loving reverence in your interactions with the Father?

The God of the universe wants you to know Him as *Abba*, Father. He is not a cosmic tyrant who will impose Himself - He wants you to choose to be in relationship with Him and know Him as the perfect dad you always wanted. By accepting His love and grace offered to you in Jesus, you are adopted into God's family as a son or daughter who will be given the greatest inheritance of all – an eternity with your loving Father in heaven.

