

The Heart of the Father

Session One — My Son, the Delight of my life (Mt 3:13-18)

Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Matthew is written as a testimony of Jesus Christ to the Jews (OT references). From birth until now, Jesus has grown up, hidden in Galilee. But now, after years of seclusion, the Sun of Righteousness is about to rise with healing in his wings. Here is the inauguration of the kingdom of God, breaking in upon the earth.

How do you announce the arrival of a king. How do you start something of such importance and magnitude. Men might have done it differently - here is how God did it:

Not: "the Messiah you've been waiting for", or "Creator of all things... bow down to Him!", or "Judge of every man and woman, fear and respect him"... no.

Before Jesus began his history-changing ministry there was one truth that he had to be absolutely grounded in: His identity was wrapped up in his relationship to His Father.

Jesus is God - yet in His humanity he had to be refreshed in the truth and realization that God was His Father, that this Father loved Him and was pleased with Him.

In fact, at the two most critical times of His life, before the temptation and before the events that led to the cross, (transfiguration), Jesus heard the voice of His Father say this. (We must start this way, we must be refreshed in this)

I keep six honest serving-men, they taught me all I knew

Their names are What and Why and When and How and Where and Who (Kipling)

Observation of Matthew 3:8 - 16

What? Jesus' baptism and revelation/affirmation

Why? Baptism: To fulfill all righteousness; Voice from heaven: affirmation that Jesus was the One they were all waiting for

When? 400 years of silence from the prophets (fulness of time); Roman occupation of Palestine; many messiah figures had sprung up (why would this one be different?)

How? The Son of God submitted to a foretold prophet; 1) baptism to show his obedience (though he did not need to repent); 2) a voice from heaven

Where? Jerusalem/Palestine — a very volatile region throughout which Gods people were spread, another foreign occupation.

Who? Not any of the other OT names/revelations of Jesus, but "my son, whom I love, with whom I am well pleased" (*Seed of the woman, Passover lamb, prophet like Moses; rejected cornerstone; suffering servant; Branch, shepherd of Israel, Root and offspring of David, rod out of the stem of Jesse, Light of the Gentiles, Rose of Sharon, Rock and Redeemer that David sung about, sure foundation*)

It is the voice of my Father that: 1) speaks life to me, 2) calms me, 3) gives me my identity — Unfortunately, father is not a very good word for most people of the world today. Desertion, divorce, drugs, drunkenness, abuses of all kinds, absence, silence, demanding (never-satisfied)

The Heart of the Father

Two most important questions I will ever grapple with:

- 1) What is God like?
- 2) What does He think of me?

We are often more concerned with what men think of us, but what God thinks of us is the foundation of our life, peace, security, ministry. We are often wrong about what God thinks about us.

False images: what we fashion from earth that replaces the glory of God and the truth about his nature. What I look to for acceptance, protection, provision, identity, safety.

So, what is God like? (Lord, Father) Holy, loving, good, stable, truthful, generous, just, reliable, merciful, kind -- I am adopted into a family like this (Our dog Nina's story)

Okay, but this is *Jesus* - and I am also "accepted in the beloved:

That we might learn to praise the glorious generosity of his which has made us welcomed in the everlasting love he bears toward the Beloved." (Eph. 1:6)

Ephesians 1 says that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings, chosen, adopted, accepted, redeemed, forgiven, given an eternal inheritance, sealed by the Spirit of God... and that doing this for us was God's "good pleasure".

Christ is accepted, I am in Christ, so I am accepted (paper in the book)

In the Beloved — Jesus' name - (Nancy's parents - door opened to us in Nancy's name)

See Jesus, see the Father - moved with compassion, healed people, cried over needs. giving, loving, serving -- shows me a Father who runs to me, hugs me, gives me a robe and ring and party!

This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life. (Message version)

Aortist tense - timeless - love once and forever felt for him

My loving Father is looking daily for an opportunity to express kindness to me.

Jesus could not start without this revelation - how much more do we need this understanding to be the foundation of our lives and ministries.

My Son - what did I do to become a son? I cannot make God love me by my efforts - I am too late, He already loves me.

Who started this thing? (Gal 3:3) -- Grace plus nothing. It is finished.

It is good that our hearts be established in grace - Hebrews 13:9

* Some are shame-based: they would rather work their way up (pride)

* We have to know our need - every child has a father, every child is needy (security, acceptance, safety)

* Many people decide to stay the way they are (the security of the prison cell) - afraid to run to the arms of the Father. They fear change (totalitarianism vs. anarchy)

The Heart of the Father

Religious people base their relationship with God on their performance (bad = He hates me; good = He loves me). Christianity is different - we do good, not to be accepted, but because we already are accepted! -- Love is our motivation, not legalism. No Muslim speaks of personal relationship to Allah! An awesome truth we live by and love for!

Jesus' Temptations: (Matthew 4:1-11)

1Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4But he answered, "*It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*"

5Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 6and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

7Jesus said to him, "*Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'*" 8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

10Then Jesus said to him, "*Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."*"

11Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Observation of Matthew 4:1-11

What? Temptation by the devil

Why? To prove that he is sinless (tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin); to be infused with power from the Spirit that he otherwise would not have known as a human?

When? Immediately after he was affirmed as the Son of God, beloved and pleasing to the Father

How? Led there by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of being tempted; Fought the enemy through the power of the Word of God — sustained by the power of God and ministered to finally by angels.

Where? wilderness (pic?) — Jesus was a rugged outdoorsman!

Who? The devil (he is a real being); the Son of God; the Word of God

If you are the Son of God - Satan immediately and constantly attack our identity

1) Matt. 4:3-4 - be the hero-provider. Use your own power to meet your own needs.

Response: (how well can you defend yourself from Deuteronomy?) - reliance in God alone - My identity is not the hero, the self-sufficient one

2) Matt 4:6 - Be unique, special; better than others; let your identity be what you can do

Response: Do not test the Lord - I do not need an outward sign that God is with me (abandonment) ("show people who you are" - comparing is a snare)

3) Matt 4:8-9 - All this I will give you - Let your identity be in your being in control

Response: I will give my praise only to God. My identity is not in being in control

The Heart of the Father

These misplaced callings (where I put my identity) are way below us.
Our calling is much higher than this - **We are beloved sons, pleasing to our Father**

My identity is: I am loved and I am a lover -- this is my center of gravity
I am a son/daughter -- this is my center of gravity

1 John 3:1 - Behold what manner of love the Father has for us that we should be called the sons of God

Romans 8:15 - the Spirit within us cries "Abba, Father"

Heb. 2:10 - Jesus died to bring many sons to the Father.

**This is my life and my future... I will be loved... and I will be loved...
This changes everything**

Graven images (my trip to India)

Is. 42:8 "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images."

- * Any **false image** we have fashioned **from earth** and **replaced** the glory of the incorruptible **God** with (not beasts, like the golden calf; rather things like an unrighteous judge, a tyrant or dictator, a heartless one who is never satisfied, one who puts me down like people on the earth do)
- * Perception is not reality, but it can become a reality to me and snare me, dictating my life with a false perception of God.
- * My perception of God affects how I perceive him to act toward with me, my identity, my worth, my ability to approach him and go deeper with him, how I minister, how I deal with my family and flock... basically all aspects of my life.

If I get this wrong, I get nearly everything wrong. The ripple effect is tragic.

Matt. 16 - Whom do men say that I am? Who do YOU say that I am?

Have you heard the Father say this to you?

"You are my son... I love you... I am pleased with you"

**** Response and Break ****

The Heart of the Father

Session Two — Lessons on Adoption - Ephesians 1:3-14

One of the things we notice when we read through the gospels is the clear identification, acceptance and approval of God, the Father toward Jesus the Son. We read for example, Matthew 3.17: ... *and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* (Mt. 3.17)

Or this... the Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. (John 13.35)

You say, Okay. But this is Jesus. What about us? How does the Father see us? How does the Father treat us? And we can know. *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you... These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."* (John 15:9,11)

Well, there are a lot of great verses that fill in this picture. But, I think Romans 8.16-17 states it best: ...*all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8.14-17)*

Adoption In the Ancient World

- Many orphans (famine, war, exposure); NT implication of total dependency (cf. John 14.18)
- Expectation was a life of slavery
- It was difficult and expensive to adopt a child in the Roman legal system, but once it was done, it was very binding. A Roman father had the legal right to disinherit or even kill natural children, but not adopted children. This sort of language in the NT reflects the believer's security in Christ.
- The Roman judicial system recognized an adopted child as a new person. All your debts and obligations from your former life were wiped away. Listen to what the Bible says about this:

Now we are no longer slaves but God's own sons. And since we are his sons, everything he has belongs to us. (Gal. 4.7 TLB)

Adoption is really **at the heart of the Gospel**. The word itself, which does not even occur until the NT, means to **'place as a son'**. This divine activity toward us by God can be summed up in what we can simply call ...

The Heart of the Father

The Blessing - In their book by the same name, John Trent and Gary Smalley write,

Young or old, just about everyone today thirsts for acceptance. Whether from a boss, a spouse or close friends, we all long for someone to reinforce our worth and tell us who we are. For most of us, this longing begins early in life with our desire for a parent's approval. Some of us received it; some of us didn't. Yet we all want it. Jesus Christ is the one person who can change our lives and the lives of loved ones who are struggling without the blessing by providing us and them with God's spiritual family blessing.

Trent and Smalley go on to identify 5 specific elements that are critical for any parent in order to pass on a genuine Blessing to their children.

- Meaningful **TOUCH** (the Spirit rested on Jesus in the form of a dove)
- A **SPOKEN** Message (this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased)
- Attaching High **VALUE** (this is my beloved Son, listen to him!)
- Picturing a Special **FUTURE** (Jesus in John 17 about future glory)
- An Active **COMMITMENT** (Jesus the Father, "you always hear me") (Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly?) (The Father has not left me alone)

You see, **What gets passed on by parent to child is more than just "resources". The blessing also has to do with identity and acceptance and affirmation and love.** We see 'The Blessing' communicated to us most clearly through Paul's writing in the book of Ephesians, particularly in chapter 1. So let's look at it and see what it teaches us about how the Father has provided to us everything as his adopted children.

(Read Ephesians 1 - entire chapter) says that we are blessed with all spiritual blessings, chosen, adopted, accepted, redeemed, forgiven, given an eternal inheritance, sealed by the Spirit of God... doing this for us was God's "good pleasure".

"In love... according to the kind intention of his will...to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he bestowed on us in the Beloved... riches of his grace, which he lavished on us... made known to us the mystery of his will... according to his kind intention..."

Let's exegete this passage: Praise for God's Blessings in Christ (1.3-14)

The apostle Paul opens with a greeting to the *"saints who are faithful"* (1:1-2).

The rest of chapter 1 essentially forms a prayer that contains two main ideas:

- Praise for God's Blessings in Christ (1.3-14) - Personal
- Prayer for Understanding those Blessings (1.15-23). - Corporate

The Heart of the Father

Several key ideas give this section its power and are worthy of deeper reflection.

- The three important participles – *'having blessed' (v.3), 'having predestined' (v.5) and 'having made known' (v.9)* – provide the foundation for living effectively in this life.
- The phrase *'according to the purpose of his will'* (vv.5,9,11)
- The prepositions 'in' (especially the phrase, *'in Christ'*).

In fact, "in Christ" is the most frequently used phrase in the whole book. The point is clear, If you're in Christ, you have everything! That simply means you are so identified with Christ that whatever he has you have too. Whatever he did, you were included in it too.

For our purposes, as it relates to this idea of adoption, we'll just focus on verses 3-14.

In verse 3, Paul gives us a summary statement that relates the theme of this letter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places ... (1.3)

You'll note the repetition of the word there - *'bless'* (eulogeo = eulogy = to speak well of) - **Bless** God who has **blessed** us with every spiritual **blessing**. He tells us that these blessings are available where? 'in the heavenly places'.

Heavenly places is not talking about heaven; No. No. *"In the heavenly places"* is a reference to the invisible realities of your life in the here and now. It includes eternity future, but it's also something to be experienced right now, in the arena of your own spiritual life.

We should remember that this is **the place where there's opposition**. It's the place where we are exposed to the attack of the principalities and powers which are mentioned in Chapter 6, those dark spirits in high places who try to get to us, and depress us, and frighten us, and make us anxious or hostile or angry.

The heavenlies is **the realm of conflict, but it's also the realm where God can release us and deliver us**, where the Spirit of God is at work to come alongside us and communicate the truth that brings us **freedom in Christ**. So, don't read this as though it were something out in space somewhere. These blessings are yours in your spiritual life and experience, right now, if you are in Jesus Christ.

What Paul is about to describe then, are realities not available through human wisdom or ingenuity, or as a result of something we can manufacture or create. They are gifts - given from God from the standpoint of eternity past to eternity future and only discovered as we connect deeply with Christ.

So **verse 3 is a summary statement**, and then he provides a more detailed description of these blessings in verses 4-14. And then finally, beginning with verse 15, Paul's great prayer that his hearers would understand what this is all about.

Now, there's an **unusual sentence structure** in this passage that I want to point out. Verses 3-14 are actually one, long sentence in the Greek, marked by a number of clauses and phrases that expand and enrich it. And if you want to get the effect of it, **take a deep breath and try to read through it in that one breath**. You'll see how much Paul has crammed into this one sentence. Commentators have compared it to:

"a person taking a walk through a treasure chamber, like those of the Pharaohs of Egypt, describing what he sees. He starts out with the most immediate and evident fact and tells us what that is. Then something else comes into view and he puts that in. And glory flashes

The Heart of the Father

upon glory here until he has this tremendously complicated sentence which includes vast and almost indescribable riches.” (Stedman)

Even though the sentence that forms vv.3-14 is complicated, there’s a fairly simple division of this passage. And that is, these blessings focus around the Persons of the Trinity. There is the work of the Father, the work of the Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

And with their activity there’s an associated perspective on time:

- The Father’s activity in **ETERNITY** past (vv.3-5, 9, 11)
- The Son’s activity in human **HISTORY** (vv.6-8,11-13)
- The Spirit’s activity until the **END** of history (10,14)

Notice also the phrase that gets repeated at the end of v.6, v.12, and v.14 - “to the praise of his glorious grace”. That phrase or something close to it, appears each time after the work of Father, Son, and Spirit. So, let’s go deeper ...

In verses 3-6 you see first that:

1. The origin/source of “every spiritual blessing” is God, THE FATHER. (3-6)

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (1.3-6)

Just to summarize the point, this says that The Father **elected believers** (from Eternity past). He literally picked you (chose you) to be his child. And to be what? Holy and Blameless.

He **predestined you** – to ordain beforehand, or predetermine. Election seems to refer to people. While predestination refers to purposes. What was the purpose? That purpose was adoption. What is adoption, really?

Adoption is the act of God by which God gives his “born ones” an ADULT STANDING in the family.

He blessed you (v.6) – not the same word as in v.3. This is the word, χαριτώ, which is the word for ‘to make graceful’ it refers to someone who is favored by God. It comes from the word for grace. So this is saying that God has graced us with his grace.

2. Then, in verses 7-12 we see that: the sphere within which the divine blessing is given and received is in relation to God, the Son. (7-12)

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. (1.7-12)

The Heart of the Father

In the **first 14 verses** of this letter, the name or title of 'Christ' (or its equivalent) occurs no fewer than **15 times**. The phrase, 'in Christ', 'in whom' or 'in him' appears **11 times**.

To be *'in Christ'* is to be incorporated or placed into him and He into us. Paul refers to this mutual identification as *"Christ, who is your life"* in Col. 3.4.

In Gal. 2.20 he says, *"My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

You see, it is because we are "in him" we can claim the blessings given by the Father. The key word here in Eph. 1.7 is the word, *"redemption"* – (to purchase and set free by paying a price). Redemption involves every good thing from God. Jesus redeemed or paid the price for our sin and bought us. The price was *"His own blood"* (metonym for death).

Redemption includes *"forgiveness"* which comes as a result, where we are released or pardoned by God.

Because of our redemption, God revealed to us the secret of his eternal purposes – You see, He has a plan. And that plan is to bring the created order back into perfect unity and harmony with Himself, the creator. Right now, there is chaos and separation in the created order because of the effects of sin. But He intends to restore what was lost in the Fall. But God revealed to us that history is going somewhere. It has meaning and purpose.

And then, finally, in verses 13-14, we see that:

3. The application of revealed truth is through God, the Spirit (13-14)

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

What does it mean to be "sealed" with the Spirit?

- Signifies that a legal transaction has taken place (legal stamp)
- Indicates ownership
- Indicates security and protection
- Proves authenticity – presence of the Spirit proves believer is genuine

The word for *"guarantee"* is the word, *arrabon* and still is used in Greece for an engagement ring.

Let me just list some of the benefits of our inheritance in Christ as adopted children:

1. You become part of God's **FAMILY**, and so every other believer becomes your brother and your sister.
2. You have a unique and intimate **RELATIONSHIP** with God. You can actually call Him, "Daddy." Wayne Grudem reminds us that "the role that is most intimate, and the role that conveys the highest privileges of fellowship with God for eternity, is his role as our heavenly Father."

The Heart of the Father

3. You become an **HEIR** with Jesus to everything God owns.
During the first century, an adopted son of a wealthy man would be given his signet ring, which essentially was his Visa card that he could use to purchase anything. If you sealed a deed with your father's signet ring, the deal was binding. The ring also served as a visible sign to all who would see it on your finger that you were your father's child.
4. You have a privileged **POSITION** that you'll hold throughout eternity.
No angel or any other created being will share your status as one of God's children.
5. One day you will **RULE** the nations with Christ during the millennial kingdom but now, you actually **REIGN** in life because of Jesus.
For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:17)

Do you know how rich you are?

ILLUSTRATE: **We Don't Act Like What We Possess (Hetty Green)**

We act like Hetty Green. Hetty Green was an American business woman known as "the richest woman in America" during the early 1900's. She died in 1916 and left an estate with an estimated value of \$100 Million Dollars – the equivalent of about 4 billion dollars today. You've probably never heard of Hetty Green. But she was **known back then not only for her wealth but also for her miserliness**; In fact, she was the only woman to amass a fortune when other major financiers were men. **How miserly was she?**

- Hetty regularly ate cold oatmeal because it cost too much to heat it. Her son had his leg amputated because she took so long to get him adequate care because she was looking for a free clinic. Hetty died in the midst of an argument over milk, because she argued that skim was better than whole, because it was cheaper. She was wealthy but she lived in poverty. She never enjoyed or benefited from the riches that were hers.

“...God has already given you everything you need. He has given you Paul and Apollos and Peter as your helpers. He has given you the whole world to use, and life and even death are your servants. He has given you all of the present and all of the future. All are yours, (1 Cor 3:21b-22)

Why does belonging to Christ make all things yours? Because Christ is God's. And if you are 'in Christ' you have what Christ has. When the Father looks at you, he sees his Son.

- *Christ is God's Son. Christ is God's image (2 Corinthians 4:4). Christ is God's Beloved (Matthew 17:5). Christ is God's radiance (Hebrews 1:3). Christ is God's heir (Hebrews 1:2).*

With this as a backdrop Paul then goes on to **pray that his readers will understand what God has done for them corporately (1:15-23).**

The Heart of the Father

Becoming “Like a Child”

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them³ and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.⁵ “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,⁶ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. (Mt. 18.1-6)

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. (1 Cor 13.11)

The bible makes a distinction between being childish and being childlike. The bible clearly states that there are things that are childish that I put away when I become mature (selfishness, the idea that the world revolves around me, small-minded thoughts, petty speech and sins)

But there are clearly some attributes of children that not only grant us entrance into the kingdom of heaven, but make us great in that kingdom.

What are some of the characteristics of children that relate us to the kingdom?

1. They haven't lost their sense of wonder. They are always ready to learn (ask questions constantly) (not afraid to ask for what they want)
2. They know that they need someone to guide them. Dependency on others.
3. They know that they don't know it all. They humbly submit to their father's guidance (teachable).
4. They are honest – they speak their mind, even when they are not supposed to!
5. They still believe anything is possible.
6. They know where to run when they are scared
7. They know that a hug can fix everything (the security of love of a parent)

****Response and Dialogue**** Meditation this week: None of this knowledge matters if it doesn't change our lives. This change only occurs as we meditate on these truths and allow the Holy Spirit to affect change in us, mentally, spiritually, and practically. Set aside some intentional time this week to pray and think deeply about how you view God and answer the following questions. Be prepared to discuss your answers next time.

1. Do you find it difficult to see yourself as God sees his own Son? How should the reality of being 'in Christ' influence one's Christian experience?
2. We mentioned 7 characteristics of childlikeness that help us to rightly pursue the kingdom of God (bottom of p 3). Which one of these do you need to develop most right now and why?
3. How does a believer put away childish things and grow up in Christ? What does the Father use to help us here (hint: Hebrews 12.10-12)?

The Heart of the Father

Session Three - Knowing God as our stable, loving, all-powerful father effects everything that we do.

Consider the life of Jesus:

- * He is the most brilliant, well-informed man who ever lived. He is the greatest moral teacher who ever lived. He is the the Savior of the world. Beyond all that, He is God, the Son, His words and life deserve a fresh hearing from us.
- * He did not live controlled by fear because he knew that His Father was in control.
- * He did not live a performance-based life, for He knew that his Father accepted Him.
- * He prayer and worship were natural and unforced (communion w/Father)

The core of His teaching was summed up in His sermon on the mount:

- * His words are not merely dogma (what we must believe), nor law (what we must do) -- *they are spirit and life*
- * They are the best information possible on the most important matters. The sermon on the mount does not contain laws - but rather shows us clearly how one who is, in fact, in the kingdom of God will live his/her life
- * *Jesus was changing the old and inaccurate way of thinking of God that had been wrongly established by mis-guided religious people.*
- * He changes the unit of measurement to show us our need of the Father's grace.
- * *He shows us how we should live in light of the fact that we are son's of the Father - how to glorify our Father (Father is taught about 14 times in the sermon)*
- * He teaches us to pray to the Father
- * He reassures us the the Father knows our need, will supply our need and is a better father than we are as humans.

Living as a beloved son effects how I live my own Christian Life

Consider the transformation in the life of the Apostle Paul (Read Acts 22:1-11)

"Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you."

And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said:

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

"As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'

Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, n'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.'

This was the end of Saul and the beginning of Paul. A single incident completely changed everything about his life. A revelation of Jesus Christ was the beginning of Paul's transformation

The Heart of the Father

- 1) **Identity** (who he was) – who Paul was and who he thought God to be changed completely. The foundation, the meaning and the purpose of his life were shaken. He was no longer right, no longer righteous, no longer better than others, no longer living through his own power. He now had a different agenda, a different criteria for making decisions, a different frame of reference, a different motivation and a different power. He had different drives, different emotional responses and an entirely different identity.

- 2) **Theology** (what he believed) – everything he believed about God changed
 - > Jesus Christ is Lord, the Jewish Messiah (**Christology**)
 - * the breaking in of a whole new understanding of the person and purposes of God
 - > Salvation is found in Jesus, not in the keeping of the law (**soteriology**)
 - * a turn from trusting in works to trusting in grace
 - > When I persecute followers of Jesus, I persecute Jesus himself (**ecclesiology**)
 - * a revelation of the body of Christ
 - > God's provision of salvation is also to be extended to the Gentiles (**missiology**)
 - * a turn from exclusion to inclusion
 - > "I myself will show him how much he must suffer for my Name's sake"
 - * incarnational Christianity

- 3) **Praxis** (how he lived) – obviously, he stopped persecuting Christians, but he also went from being law-centered to Christ-centered – he began to live in the rhythms of grace. I want to focus on how a revelation of Jesus Christ will free us to live in grace, be accepted by grace, work by grace.

What does living in grace look like?

- 1) **Grace causes me to understand that all of my life and work was initiated and is sustained by God (Gal 1:13-16)**

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man...

 - a. Paul's description of his conversion (Gal. 1:15-16)
 - God set me apart** from birth (divine call)
 - God called me by His grace** (Grounded in love of God)
 - God revealed his Son in me** (revelation of Jesus)
 - God sent me** to preach among the Gentiles (Mission and purpose) (Pretty God-centric, eh?)
 - b. If I did not start it, how can I stop or control it? If I did not have the power to start it, how can I, in my own power, sustain it?

- 2) **Grace causes me to switch the foundation for my life from confidence in the flesh to confidence in relationship (Phil 3:3-15)**

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew

The Heart of the Father

of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.

The moment you begin to undervalue Jesus and His work you begin to overvalue yourself and you have moved right into idolatry. Instead of living your life in complete dependence upon and appreciation to Jesus for everything you are and have, you go back to depending on yourself and earning your way to heaven or into favor with God.

Notice Paul's description of his transformation:

From confidence in the flesh (lineage, performance, knowledge of Law, love of Law (*I know who I am, I know the Law*) —> To confidence in relationship (I want to know Him, receiving the love of God and the gift of righteousness)

Remember his first question – **Who are you Lord?**

3) **Grace causes me to forget what is behind and press on to what lies ahead (maturity) (Phil 3:13-14)**

There are things we are supposed to remember and things we are not supposed to remember. The criteria is that we should remember the things that God remembers or tells us to remember and forget the things that God forgets or tells us to forget.

Staying in the past from which God has forgiven and redeemed us can hinder us from coming into the purposes that God has for us now and in the future. We have to conclude our past and turn our gaze in another direction.

What was Paul forgetting? Was it his past sins? – I don't believe so, for he knew this was under the blood and no longer an issue. I think he was forgetting those things he once put confidence in (what he had listed just before this) – His perceptions of what knowing God was – His ideas of what is important.

4) **Grace causes me to work harder and rest easier than everyone else (1 Cor. 15:9-10)**

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

My zeal in persecuting the church was shameful, but by God's grace, I am an apostle and this grace caused me to work harder than them all "Yet not I but the grace of God within me"

Works of performance --> Rest (live loved) --> Works of love

Paul's great secret to the Christian life and ministry: **No longer I, but Christ**

The Heart of the Father

Session Four: Living as a Beloved Son effects how I pray

What is your definition of Prayer?

Dictionary: A solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God or an object of worship.

All of us know that we should pray more (it is what Christians do, right?)

Yes, and also, something in our hearts cries out for God - deep calls to deep; eternity in our hearts, so only connecting with eternity will fulfill our hearts).

Prayer is basic to human existence. It is actually our very first conscious act as a new born baby. **Our first sound is a prayer**, we cry to get what we need. **We are incapable of making it on our own - so we pray.**

Through prayer we reach into the unknown for whatever we sense, deep within us, will provide the things we need: well-being, wholeness, hope, salvation.

Prayer is not something that we first learn how to do and then do it - we simply do it, and in the doing, we find out what we are doing and we deepen and mature in it.

So we all have a nagging guilt about praying more, **but we don't always think about why or how we pray - or to whom we pray.** Let's learn from Jesus:

The Lord's Prayer is not *the* prayer to pray; the words are not magical in themselves. Rather, it is a prayer to teach us how to pray ("pray, then, in this way"). It is the foundation for a praying life - not a ritual, but relationship of a Father to his children.

Matt. 6:9 "Pray, then, in this way:

'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'When do you pray? Most of us pray (or at least pray seriously) when we are in trouble.

Our - Corporate aspect (horizontal relationship in prayer)

Father - Personal and relational (literally, a relative!) aspect (vertical relationship)

Who is in heaven - who is there (Heb 11:6) — he exists and we are secure that he is always accessible; he is the highest authority in heaven and earth.

Holy is your name - adoration ("may your name be treasured and adored")

Your kingdom come - we look to His interests, to join his kingdom - the realm of his active reign in our lives and the people and circumstances around us.

Your will, done here - we pray and believe for impact and change here, now

Petition - give us our physical needs

Forgiveness - give us our spiritual needs and change us so that we can give the same to others

Protection - Keep me from trials and the evil one

Praise for His position - You have all authority, power and glory - forever (and that is just the way we want it!)

The Heart of the Father

Know - The “who” of prayer (to the Father)

Prayer is influenced by what I think about God.

Father to love or judge to appease?

Distant or near (transcendent or imminent)?

The fact is that both are true - prayer is a relationship of “the friendship and the fear!”
Deep affection but also a wholesome dread of displeasing God.

He wants us with Him; He wants us working with Him in His purposes on earth.

Prayer is an invitation into the heart and mission of God.

My change: Law to Love - duty to devotion

When you love someone, you want to talk to them, to be with them, you are concerned with what they are concerned with. (Melissa when I am away)

- 1) *God wants us to treasure Him and His presence* - I have the treasure of the Holy Spirit, active in and through me every day. Love for God is everything and out of that love should proceed a continual awareness of and conversation with Him, and a working together with Him for His purposes. This promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit, according to Jesus’ words, is even superior to His bodily presence!

* Also there is a corporate aspect of prayer that is very important.

Be - The “why” of prayer” (Prayer flows from who I am)

- 1) **Relationship** - *Our Father, you are holy*
- 2) **Purpose** - *Your kingdom come Your will be done - My character affects my prayer life for I must be others-oriented*
- 3) *God wants me to keep in step with the Spirit.* The active work of the Holy Spirit (speaking, guiding, convicting, drawing, enlightening, teaching, empowering) requires me to have my eyes and ears open and my mind and to be flexible.
- 4) *My character affects my prayer life* -

Do - The “how, when, where” of prayer (we learn skills or tools, but the tools serve us, we do not serve the tools)

- 1) Without ceasing: *God is more concerned about my response to His Spirit’s leading today than what I am to do in the next ten years.* He has not promised me a twenty year action plan - but he has promised to never leave me or forsake me. I need to obey in the next ten minutes and leave the next ten years to him. The key to deep happiness and fulfillment is walking in obedience to my Father in this moment.
“Mindful of now!”

The Heart of the Father

- 2) Find the time and method that works for you to develop the discipline of prayer (for me: morning, routine place, very good coffee, word, worship, personal prayer document, Five minutes of listening; last minutes of the day-rest)
- 3) 20-minute meditation exercise turned to prayer
- 4) Pray immediately - a very focussed 30 second prayer

Where did they pray?

The apostles did not separate themselves from the Judaism they grew up in.

- 1) They continued to pray in 1) [Solomon's Porch of the temple](#), worshiping the one true God through His incarnate Son (Acts 2:46; 3:1). They also met in other places in Jerusalem.
- 2) Thousands of new believers crowded their praying assemblies. 2) [Houses in Jerusalem](#) became places of prayer and worship where the Lord's Supper was celebrated. This led to action: the sharing of food and goods united the praying community.
- 3) It's not that you can't pray on your own, of course. But we have missed out on the fact that biblical prayer is prayer together

What did they pray?

Like "the fellowship" and "the breaking of bread", the word "prayers" has the definite article we see in the ESV rendering in the original Greek. So it was not "prayer" they devoted themselves to, but instead "the prayers."

What was the content of these prayers? The text is silent on this point. But we know from Acts 2:46 that they were meeting both in the temple courts and from house to house, so these prayers that defined their fellowship were not private devotions. These were public prayers, or prayer meetings.

- 1) [They prayed for their needs and for the purposes of God](#): Luke gives us a taste of their prayer when Peter and John were released after they healed a lame beggar: *'Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus'* (Acts 4:29–30) — Their prayers were focused on the kingdom of God on earth.

- 2) [There were public prayer times - here they prayed the Psalms \(scripture\)](#)

If they were praying in the temple, they were praying the Psalms. Psalms were the guide to prayer in the early church (Psalms were noted three times in the first two chapters as guides as to what the young church should do). David, the writer of so many psalms, is referred to several times as well.

- * The Psalms are our prayer manual: they are not the flowery, flowing, lush kind of prayers. They are honest, often messy and awkward - answering to the God who has addressed us first.

The Heart of the Father

- * Left to ourselves, we will pray to some God who speaks what we like hearing, or whom we understand. The Psalms have no time for such foolishness. They confront us with the mystery of interacting with the God that is beyond us.
- * Left to ourselves, we are never so selfish than when we pray. We ask for our needs, impulses and desires to be gratified. But the Psalms (and liturgy) pull us away from ourselves and into the praying community, as prayer is intended to function.

Praying the Psalms together made them a healthy church

- * Prayer in Israel was not left up to individuals to do more or less whatever they felt inclined to do. Worship, and therefore prayer, was a community project. Even if some of the psalms originated in solitude, the only form they came to us in are the prayers of the community in worship before God. We see words like “selah” and “to the choir master”, etc. prove to us that prayer was done together in a certain way at a certain time and place with regard to others in the community. When the temple was used in worship, there was a director who gave leadership. The discipline of gathering together to pray at certain times rescues us from the disease of being led by our feelings to pray. If we only pray when we feel like it, we will not pray much, or well.
- * Eugene Peterson: *“Feelings are the scourge of prayer. To pray by feelings is to be at the mercy of glands and weather and digestion. And there is no mercy in any of them. Feelings lie. They are real, but they are no more spiritual than muscles. To suppose that our feelings/emotions in any way give us reliable evidence of the nature and quality of our life with God is to misinterpret them... The full gamut of emotions are expressed through the Psalms, but feelings do not have the first and controlling word... God’s Word does. How do we both affirm our feelings and detach ourselves from them? Through corporate prayer. We do not pray only when we feel like it, but when the community comes together and the leader says, “Let us pray”.”*
- * *We need to assemble together to pray in order to be sane, balanced, healthy people!*
- * The Psalms cause us to remember what God has done for us, that we have an enemy to overcome, that God always has the last word.

The Heart of the Father

Session Five: Living as a Beloved Son effects how I worship

Worship the Father - the most radical idea Jesus ever introduced (John 4:19-24)

Who is this God that we worship?

- * If we are not careful we can fall into Jesus' indictment: "You do not know what you are worshiping" (Jn 4). We can get insight on how we are to do the practicals of worship through the study of God Himself.
- * **Worship is a revelation and a response, leading to an ever-deepening relationship**
- * The depth, quality and level of passion of our worship is directly proportionate to the way we view God. We can't worship big when we have a small God. We can't worship close when we have a distant God.
- * **What is God like? (interactive)**

A study on how different religions approach/worship God

Hinduism

Most Hindus worship a multitude of gods and goddesses, millions of them. These various gods all converge into a universal spirit called the Ultimate Reality or Brahman. Brahman is not a god, but more of a term for ultimate oneness.

Hindus see their position in this present life as based on their actions in a previous life. If their behavior before was evil, they might experience tremendous hardships in this life. A Hindu's goal is to become free from the law of karma...to be free from continuous reincarnations.

There are three possible ways to end this cycle of karma:

- 1 Be lovingly devoted to any of the Hindu gods or goddesses;
- 2 Grow in knowledge through meditation of Brahman (oneness)...to realize that circumstances in life are not real, that selfhood is an illusion and only Brahman is real;
- 3 Be dedicated to various religious ceremonies and rites.

In Hinduism, a person has the freedom to choose how to work toward spiritual perfection. Hinduism also has a possible explanation for the suffering and evil in the world. According to Hinduism, the suffering anyone experiences, whether it is sickness or starvation or a disaster, is due that person because of their own evil actions, usually from a previous lifetime. Only the soul matters which will one day be free of the cycle of rebirths and be at rest.

(Goal: to be free from law of karma - we reap what we sow; the depravity of man)

Buddhism

Buddhists do not worship any gods or God. People outside of Buddhism often think that Buddhists worship the Buddha. However, Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) never claimed to be divine, and Buddhists reject the notion of any supernatural power. The universe operates by natural law.

Life is seen as consisting of pain: pain in birth, sickness, death, and continuous sorrow and despair. Most Buddhists believe a person has hundreds or thousands of reincarnations, all bringing misery. And it is the desire for happiness that causes a person's reincarnation.

Therefore, the goal of a Buddhist is to purify one's heart and to let go of all desires. A person must abandon all sensuous pleasures, all evil, all joy and all sorrow.

To do so, **Buddhists are to follow a list of religious principles and intense meditation.**

When a Buddhist meditates it is not the same as praying or focusing on a god, it is more of a self-discipline. Through dedicated meditation a person may reach Nirvana — "the blowing out" of the flame of desire.

The Heart of the Father

Buddhism provides something that is true of most religions: disciplines, values and directives that a person may want to live by. Some of these Buddhist guidelines are: Do not destroy any living creature; abandon all sensual pleasures; abandon all evil qualities, and both joy and sorrow.

(goal is a pure heart; some who claim to be Christians reject the supernatural; their meditation is not our meditation, though their meditation is healthy in terms of mental margin and discipline; quench desire?)

Islam

Muslims believe there is the one almighty God, named Allah, who is infinitely superior to and transcendent from humankind. Allah is viewed as the creator of the universe and the source of all good *and all evil*. Everything that happens is Allah's will. He is a powerful and strict judge, who will be merciful toward followers depending on the sufficiency of their life's good works and religious devotion. A follower's relationship with Allah is as a servant to Allah. Though a Muslim honors several prophets, Muhammad is considered the last prophet and his words and lifestyle are that person's authority.

To be a Muslim, one has to follow five religious duties:

- 1 Repeat a creed about Allah and Muhammad;
- 2 Recite certain prayers in Arabic five times a day;
- 3 Give to the needy;
- 4 One month each year, fast from food, drink, sex and smoking from sunrise to sunset;
- 5 Pilgrimage once in one's lifetime to worship at a shrine in Mecca.

At death — ***based on one's faithfulness to these duties*** — a Muslim hopes to enter Paradise, a place of sensual pleasure. If not, they will be eternally punished in hell.

For many people, Islam matches their expectations about religion and deity. Islam teaches that there is one supreme God, who is worshiped through good deeds and disciplined religious rituals. After death a person is rewarded or punished according to their religious devotion.

(Goal: Paradise/reward; similarities: one God; eternal punishment; worship through good deeds (moralistic deism))

Judaism

Jews observe and approach God through the laws that are written in the Torah. They observe Shabbat (from Friday evening to Saturday evening) with a special prayer/blessing (Kiddush) meal and/or Shabbat service. They see this as a time of renewal and peace and often avoid work or shopping. We will study more about Judaism verses Jesus' teaching on worship later.

(Goal: being right with God by keeping the laws of God; one God)

New Age

New Age promotes the development of the person's own power or divinity. When referring to God, a follower of New Age is not talking about a transcendent, personal God who created the universe, but is referring to a higher consciousness within themselves.

A person in New Age would see themselves as God, the cosmos, the universe. In fact, everything that the person sees, hears, feels or imagines is to be considered divine.

Highly eclectic, New Age presents itself as a collection of ancient spiritual traditions. It acknowledges many gods and goddesses, as in Hinduism. The Earth is viewed as the source of all spirituality, and has its own intelligence, emotions and deity. But superseding all is self. Self is

The Heart of the Father

the originator, controller and God of all. There is no reality outside of what the person determines.

New Age teaches a wide array of eastern mysticism and spiritual, metaphysical and psychic techniques, such as breathing exercises, chanting, drumming, meditating ...to develop an altered consciousness and one's own divinity.

Anything negative a person experiences (failures, sadness, anger, selfishness, hurt) is considered an illusion. Believing themselves to be completely sovereign over their life, nothing about their life is wrong, negative or painful. Eventually a person develops spiritually to the degree that there is no objective, external reality. A person, becoming a god, creates their own reality.

Goal: self realization/actualization; unleashing the power that is inherent within you; realizing your oneness with everything;

(There is a lot of self-absorption and self-generating power in the hyper-faith movement)

*** There are elements of all of these religions in cultural Christianity (religious Christianity), but that is not the same as a genuine relationship with Jesus.**

Biblical Christianity

Christians believe in a loving God who has revealed himself and can be personally known in this life. In Christianity the person's focus is not on religious rituals or performing good works, but on enjoying a relationship with God by His grace and growing to know him better.

Faith in Jesus Christ himself, not just in his teachings, is how the Christian experiences joy and a meaningful life. In his life on Earth, Jesus did not identify himself as a prophet pointing to God or as a teacher of enlightenment. Rather, Jesus claimed to be God in human form. He performed miracles, forgave people of their sin and said that anyone who believed in him would have eternal life. He made statements like, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Christians regard the Bible as God's written message to humankind. In addition to its being an historical record of Jesus' life and miracles, the Bible reveals God's personality, his love and truth, and how one can have a relationship with him.

Whatever circumstances a Christian is dealing with in their life, they can confidently turn to a wise and powerful God who genuinely loves them. They believe that God answers prayer and that life takes on meaning as they live to honor him.

Is there a difference?

In looking at these major belief systems and their views of God, we find tremendous diversity:

- Hindus believe in millions of gods.
- Buddhists say there is no deity.
- New Age followers believe they are God.
- Muslims believe in a powerful but detached God.
- Christians believe in a God who is loving and approachable.

Are all religions worshiping the same God? Let's consider that. New Age teaches that everyone should come to center on a cosmic consciousness, but it would require Islam to give up their God, Hinduism to give up their numerous gods, and Buddhism to establish that there is a God.

The world's major religions (Hinduism, New Age, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity) are each quite unique. And of these one affirms that there is a personal, loving God who can be known, now in

The Heart of the Father

this life. Christianity talks about a God who welcomes us into a relationship with him and comes along side us as a comforter, counselor and powerful God who loves us.

In Hinduism a person is on their own trying to gain release from karma. In New Age a person is working at their own divinity. In Buddhism it is an individual quest at being free from desire. And in Islam, the individual follows religious laws for the sake of paradise after death. In Christianity, you see a personal relationship with a personal God — a relationship that carries over into the next life.

Can a person connect with God in this life?

The answer is **yes**. Not only can you connect with God, you also can know that you are fully accepted and loved by God. Jesus introduced us to this connection - a relationship - with God as Father. This was a very revolutionary concept and it got him into great trouble with the Jews. We were created by God to live in relationship with him. Many religions focus on a person's spiritual efforts. Christianity is a two-way interaction between you and God. He welcomes us to go to him.

This is not a commitment to a method of self-improvement like the Eight Fold Path or the Five Pillars, or meditation, or good works or even the Ten Commandments. These seem clear, well-defined, easy-to-follow paths for spirituality. But they become a burdensome striving for perfection, and connection with God is still distant. Our hope is not in following laws or standards, but in knowing a Savior who fully accepts us because of our faith in him and his sacrifice for us. We don't earn our place in heaven by religious efforts or good deeds. Heaven is a free gift to us, when we begin a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Eternal life has to do with knowing God (John 17:3) — and this God is a Father.

The wonder of worshipping the Father. This is the great revelation of the New Testament. Jesus forever changed our relationship to God. This may be the most radical thing Jesus ever said! Worship is beyond outward forms and into relationship. Jesus' favorite term for God: Father (70 times in John alone)

Worship before Christ	Worship after Christ
God is distant and unapproachable	God is Father
Based on performance	Based on the finished work of Christ
Done in a specific place a specific way at specific times	Done in our hearts at all times
Over 600 laws plus many other laws that were manmade (religion)	Love Him and live accordingly (relationship)

The Heart of the Father

Session Six: Living as a Beloved Son effects how I minister to others

John 5:17 *But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working... 19 Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. 20 "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.***

John 8:28 *So Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and **I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.***

John 12:49 *"For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. 50 "I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore **the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.**"*

John 14:9 *Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father*

As beloved children of God, we have the privilege of doing and speaking what our Father does and speaks. Our day-to-day relationship is the source of our ministry to others. Our approach to ministry does not originate or emanate from our own minds, but we have the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of adoption, who cries out, "Abba, Father") within us to guide and empower our ministry to others. As daughters and sons, we are co-laborers together with Him to bring His kingdom to those around us.

Exodus 34: 1-4,12-17 - Moses' response: I do not want the promise without the presence. **The presence is more to be desired than the promise**

What makes us different as individuals? As families? A church? People in our community? As a societal group?

Covenant Presence – When God makes a covenant w/ his people, he promises his presence forever. Exodus 3:11-12 – "I will be with you"

He is not a dead-beat dad - we never have to worry – we will never be abandoned

Acts 1:4-5 "Promise of My Father" – the promise was a New Covenant renewal of the Old Testament promise of the covenant presence. ("With Day" story)

John 16:7

*But I tell you the truth: It is for your **good that I am going away.** Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*

"I tell you the truth" (as if they could not believe it) It is **better**, to **your advantage**, **more profitable** for you that I go – for then I will send the Spirit

Parakletos – *one called alongside to help; advocate; consoler, comforter*

Jesus, as an incarnate human being, cannot possibly be with all of us, all the time. He was a comforter to his disciples, but he would now send *another* comforter to them.

The Heart of the Father

Galatians 5:25 – Written to legalists – Christian life is more than do's and do not's
“**Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit**”

It is the Spirit who gives us life – it is the Spirit who shows us how to live it. Since we have this precious presence, let's listen, let's pay attention, let's line up with Him.

Keep in step with, in submission to, shadowing the very heart and will of the Holy Spirit
Gk: *stoicheo* - to walk in line (in relation to others); to walk in rows, **military rank**

Maybe another picture communicates this word/process better: **A dance**

Circle Dance – the relationship within the Trinity. They always keep in step with one another.

Work together in creation, in sustaining this world, in redeeming mankind, they defer to one another, they honor one another, there is not the least bit of jealousy between them - It is a vibrant relationship, a co-working community, a living and breathing motion toward the purposes of God. This is how we are to be with the Holy Spirit.

Dance Lessons – someone to lead, someone to follow

The Holy Spirit is the only one who knows what to do

The Spirit of God knows the mind of God and makes known God's thoughts to us.

Practicalities:

Filled means producing fruit (Gal 5)

- The result of walking in the Holy Spirit is always positive **moral action and reaction toward others**. (How else can one measure spirituality, accept in the context of relationships?)

Mirroring the very attributes of God by the fruit of the Spirit — Gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, rich in love — Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithful, goodness, gentle, self-control

- If the members of your family were secretly polled as to whether or not you were filled with the Holy Spirit over the past two weeks, what would the verdict be?

Why is this important? Life direction, daily decisions, Wisdom in the moment, marriage, job, financial decisions, relationship decisions

* My story – “**Don't you ever talk to my daughter like that again**”

I was not leading, I was not listening, I was not in step with the Spirit – but I let that experience remind me that The Spirit gives life and the flesh profits nothing and I try to be more tuned in to the Spirit.

One more point:

We take this as an individual command – we forget that Paul was writing to entire congregations of churches (a different Gk. Word is used for individual walk.

Response and discussion

The Heart of the Father

Session Seven: Living as a Beloved Son effects how I view chastening

Heb. 12:1-13 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?*

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

I think it will be helpful to approach verses 3–11 like this:

- 1 We will notice the pain and sorrow are a fact of life (especially Christian life) - see Heb 11 - "consider him who endured"*
- 2 We will ask what kind it is and where it comes from (who is in charge of it?). It says that God is disciplining us; he is teaching us and correcting us and transforming us.*
- 3 We will ask if it has a purpose or design and what it is.*

In other words, God has a purpose and a design in what is happening to us. God is the ultimate doer here. Verse 6 goes so far as to say, "[God] scourges every son whom he receives." God is not coming to his children late after the attack, and saying, "I can make this turn for good." That is not discipline. That is repair. It's the difference between the surgeon who plans the incision for our good, and the emergency room doctor who sews us up after a freak accident. This text says, God is the doctor planning our surgery, not the doctor repairing our lacerations... It is out of love and for the purpose of righteousness.

God has a place to bring us to... He is jealous over us, over the image of Jesus, the life of God that He has placed within us. He will not allow us to stay the way we are.

Luke 3:16-18 -- *"John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*

His winnowing fork is in His hand to clear (thoroughly cleanse) his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.

Good news! Part of the message of the good news of the gospel that God had recorded for us is the process of Jesus cleansing His threshing floor. John is using a word picture of a very common occurrence that his 1st century audience would be able to identify with.

The Heart of the Father

The Threshing Floor

The sheaves were spread out and the softer types of grains were flailed or beaten with sticks or rods to get the kernels of grain out. The harder grains were beaten or thrown on the threshing floor and oxen were yoked side by side driven over the sheaves. If this wasn't enough they were yoked to a threshing sledge -- a large block of wood with stones on top to weigh it down. If this wasn't enough, pieces of iron were fastened to the lower surface of the block to make it rough and this was dragged over the grain, beating out the kernels. *(What ever it took to get the hard grain out of there is the method that was used.)* **God will bring us the easiest way we will go, but He will bring us.**

The grain was then winnowed. With a winnowing fork the grain was thrown up into the air and the wind blew away the chaff, stubble and worthless parts while the good grain fell to the ground. The chaff and stubble were then burned (Matt 3:12; Isaiah 5:24) and finally the grain was sifted (Amos 9:9) and was useable.

What God does at the threshing floor

Judges 6

Israel sins; Midianites oppress them; they live in caves; everything was destroyed; no food, great poverty; Prophetic voice comes, "serve only me"; an angel of God appears to Gideon *while he is threshing*; "The Lord is with you"; **God identifies, empowers and commissions at the threshing floor!** He builds an altar to the Lord and Israel is delivered.

Judges 6:37

Gideon's fleece was stretched out on the threshing floor -- **God confirms His direction in your life at the threshing floor.**

Ruth 3

Ruth and Naomi are poor; Boaz was rich; He was threshing barley when she asked him to be her kinsman redeemer; he agrees, her seed is perpetuated; the line of Jesus is continued; **God brings redemption, changes destinies, and fulfills promises at the threshing floor.**

1 Chronicles 21

Judgment of God because of Israel and David's sins; pestilence and death; angel of the Lord commands David to set up an altar at the threshing floor of Ornan -- David paid a price for the threshing floor, built an altar, offered offerings to the Lord; fire fell on the altar; the Lord commanded the angel of the death to stop. **Judgment is stayed and sin is forgiven at the threshing floor.**

2 Chronicles 3:1

Where there was judgment and repentance (The threshing floor of Ornan), Solomon built the temple, the house of the Lord. **The presence and dwelling of God is at the threshing floor.**

2 Samuel 6:6

David bringing up the Ark; they did it the wrong way...not the way God had said to do it; Uzzah touches the Ark as it topples and he dies; God is angry when man touches His glory. **God's judgment and His adjustment when doing a good thing the wrong way is at the threshing floor.**

The Heart of the Father

Isaiah 28:27 -- *"Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cummin; Caraway is beaten out with a rod and cummin with a stick.*

Grain must be ground to make bread; so one does not go on threshing it forever. Though he drives the wheels of his threshing cart over it, his horses do not grind it.

All this also comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom."

Different men are threshed with different processes. God knows just the right one to use. It will not go on forever. In His magnificent wisdom He threshes as needed to bring forth the desired fruit. **There are riches in the process! There is a treasure in the threshing floor and in the dealings of God. Don't fight it, cooperate with it. It is Your Father in heaven pressing out the fruit in your life and burning up the chaff for His glory. It is part of the Good News!**

Luke 9:23 -- There is no escaping the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross comes through everyday processes and **if we have any sense at all, we will cooperate with God, embrace the cross and say yes to the dealings of God.** Cease your season (wilderness).

John 12:24-25 – *"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of corn falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."*

2 Cor. 4:10-12 – *"Death works in us, but life works in you"*

The only way to release the life of God into our lives and ministries is through the process of death. (Amy Carmichael Poem)

Psalm 31:21 — Blessed be the LORD, For He has made marvelous His lovingkindness to me in a besieged city.

***Response and Questions**

The Heart of the Father

Session Eight: Living as a Beloved Son effects my attitude toward sin
The greatest way to fight against sin is not to focus on resisting temptation, but to be fulfilled in my relationship with my Father

Session Nine: Living as a Beloved Son effects how I view authority

I do what I see the Father do, I speak what the Father speaks - relational leading through imitative living.

Authority/Team within the Trinity - not top-down, but bottom-up, supportive, identifying, equipping and releasing people into roles of authority.

** John 13:1-17 - Servant leadership - taking the towel

Personhood
Respect

People Development
Reproduction

Production
Results

Permission
Relationship

Position
Rights

Against peasant mentality - harshness/sternness; not a czar (dictator), not a president (democracy), but a benevolent Father-king (Character and works) - Access

The Heart of the Father

Session Ten: Living as a Beloved Son effects how I view legacy

“For Your Name’s Sake” - the family name; stewardship

What will I do to uphold the honor of my Father’s Name

Rev 2:3 *...and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary*

God entrusts us with things to put to work.

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Luke 12:48b

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? Luke 16:10-12

From God’s perspective, it is a matter of **trust**

From our perspective, it is a matter of **stewardship**

Steward (Manager) – a person put in charge of something that belongs to someone else

The key perspective: Ownership – whose is this anyway?

The take away point: I am not my own – my stuff is not mine

God owns it all – He gives some of it to me to faithfully steward **for His purposes**

This is **counter culture** in our independent, self-realized, American dream, right to own private property, consumer-driven, he-who-dies-with-the-biggest-toys-wins culture

What do you want me to do with this?

- Sometimes the answer is not profound: “Love your wife... Be faithful and wait for further instructions... Do the last thing I told you.”
- Sometimes it is a totally different mindset – begin to do things you were not doing (or quit doing things you were doing)

Maybe you are thinking, “Well, I really don’t have that much to be steward over”

Things that I can be a steward over:

Time, Money (tithing, giving, helping those in need), Possessions (using them for God, sharing them), Spouse (am I loving/respecting as I ought to?), Children (am I raising them in the fear and admonition of the Lord?), Relationship/friendship, Burden/calling, Thoughts, Words, Actions, Spiritual Gifts, Employment, Employees, Witness for Christ, Position of influence, Vote, Talent/Skill, Estate, Knowledge (of scripture, of ethics (do what is right)), Word of prophecy, Body (temple care/sexual purity), Trial/suffering, Hands/Feet, Care of the earth

For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. - Is Jesus Lord of these areas of my life?

The Heart of the Father

A lesson from Moses

God was about to act in delivering his covenant people from bondage in Egypt, so he called a man.

- 1) Equipping of Moses
 - a. God's presence ("I will be with you")
 - b. God's supply ("I AM")
 - c. God's guidance to speak - "I will speak to you. I will teach you what to say"

Then the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand? Ex 4:2

You can learn a lot about God from the questions He asks. He does not ask questions because He does not know the answer. He asks them to guide me - to make me think – to reveal my heart (to me) – to change me

- Sometimes God anoints what He has already put into our hands to bring His kingdom purposes about where we are
- Sometimes, like the apostle Paul, God radically redirects our lives

If I asked you:

- Who are you? (self-awareness)
- What are you gifted in? (strengths, talents)
- Where has God placed your hands in order to make a difference?

If we really believed in our hearts that we will stand before Jesus Christ on the great and terrible day of judgment and give account for all we have been given, this thought would surely alter the way we live our lives day by day.

We can think of stewardship in terms of four T's: (with questions)

Time – How am I spending my life?

Talent – What am I doing with my abilities?

Treasure – What am I doing with my money and possessions

Temple – How am I glorifying God in my body?

(1/3 of Jesus' recorded ministry dealt with time, talent and treasure)

Talent

Get to know your strengths – forget trying to raise your weaknesses

Blessed is the man who knows his strengths and abides therein

What am I good at? How can I use those strengths for the furtherance of God's kingdom?

What do I bring to the team? What is my unique perspective? **What talents or strengths has God given me to steward? Am I faithfully using them?**

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 4:9-11

The Heart of the Father

Every one of us is unique – you are the only one who can bring your gifts to the family, the team, the church, the job.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. Rom 12:3-8

David Bush – A true worshiper - Can't play an instrument – decided that he *can* learn to run sound - Over twenty years of faithful service.

What about being faithful at my place of work? If I have an excellent spirit, I will make an impact, I will glorify God, and I will likely get promoted.

Treasure

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Acts 4:32-35

**Do I honestly view my money and my possessions as belonging to God?
Is all I have at His disposal?**