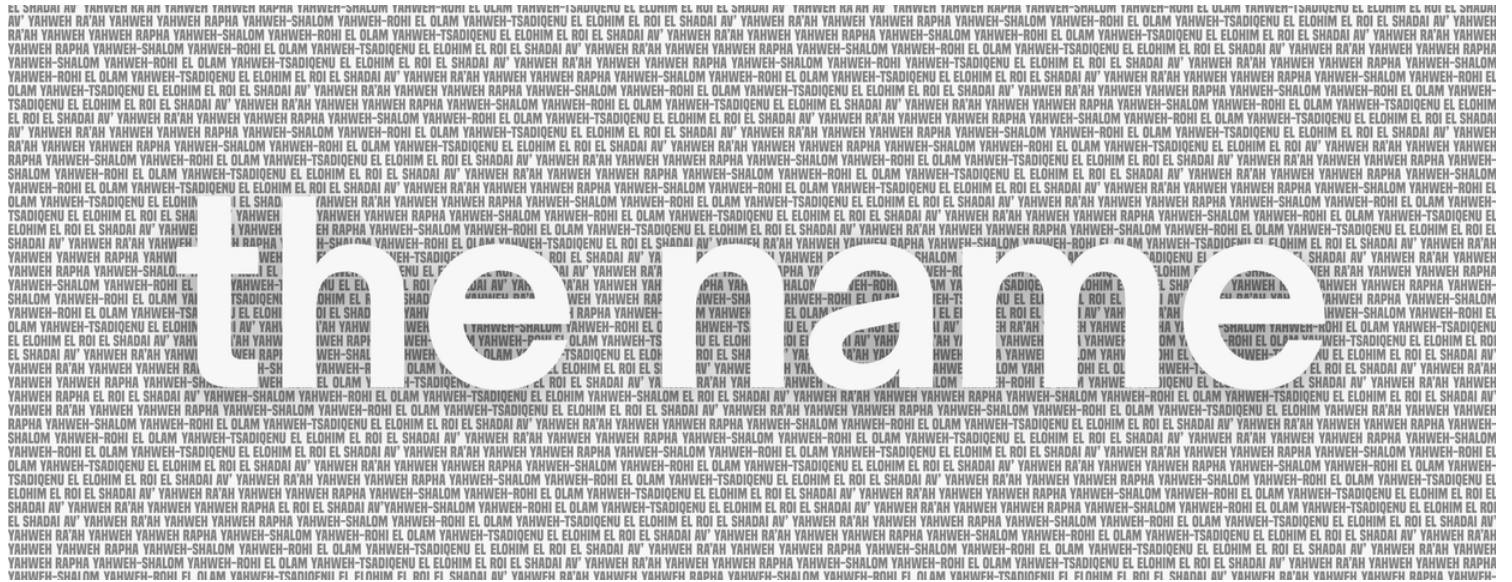




PART 5: ABBA FATHER

By Trish Wilbee

Luke 15:11-24; Romans 8:14-16

What does a good dad look like?

The word ABBA comes from the Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, and translates to our word Papa or even Dad. Its term of great intimacy and affectionate respect.

The concept of God being Father goes back to the very beginning pages of the Bible. But the reference of the much closer, more personal, deeply relational use of ABBA – comes straight from Jesus.

I. God as Father – Old Testament

A. Fatherly Actions:

In the very first pages of our Bible. God shows up doing fatherly things – He creates Adam. He gives him a name. It suggests He walked with Adam in the garden. God was relational and He was filling the role of father right from the beginning even if the role wasn't named.

B. First Family Connections:

God called Moses and told him to tell Pharaoh, "Israel is my first born son." Ex 4:22. You may be treating them like slaves but to me – they are my firstborn child.

C. First Called Father:

The first mention of God as Father is in Deuteronomy 32:6 again by Moses. This is during the Exodus when Israel was being brought out of slavery and heading to the Promised Land. They had rebelled by making a golden calf while Moses was on the mountain talking to God. Later, Moses wrote a song, and in this song states:

Deuteronomy 32:6 – Is this the way you repay the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?"

Moses was speaking identity to them – you aren't your own, you are children of God.

D. Wisdom Books:

Psalm 68:5 – "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling,"

Psalm 103:13 – "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.

Proverbs 3:11,12 – "Do not despise the Lord's discipline... because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

E. Major & Minor Prophets:

The prophets refer to God as Father.

Isaiah 64:8 – *Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. He is active in forming us.*

Malachi 2:10 – *“Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us?”*

In Jeremiah, you hear the broken-hearted heart of God. It shows how he always wanted to be a Father to his people.

Jeremiah 3:19 – *“I myself said ‘How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.’ I thought you would call me ‘father’ and not turn away from following me.”*

But even though Israel was unfaithful, God’s redemptive plan continued to unfold.

By the late 90’s -2000’s, the father image had changed to men who were lazy, impulsive, irresponsible, childish, emotionally detached, cynical and quite often incompetent. Ex. Homer Simpson, Everybody Loves Raymond , Married...with Children.

If Evil wanted to subvert an understanding of what a Good Father God is, the best way would be to ruin our view of Fathers – to see Him through the lens of our fallible earthly fathers or make the image of Fathers dispensable or foolish, laughable or hurtful, irrelevant or even malevolent.

But we, as Christians, in contrast to bad examples in real life or in the media, hold to a deep respect of Fathers and their highly important role in the home and community.

Even those of us that grew up with great fathers, they were still human. They aren’t perfect and they simply can’t show up 100% of the time on every day of our childhood and be exactly what we need them to be.

For that we have God the Father. When our human father’s fail us, we can turn to our Heavenly Father who never fails – who always sees us. Who knows the struggles in this world and longs to soothe us. Who provides spaces of safety and security for us. Let’s dig into those characteristics a little deeper.

II. The Father Image Problem

A. Personal Experience

Many of you didn’t have a good example of a father growing up. The word may contain memories of abuse or abandonment, distant, or struggling, inconsistent or even completely absent.

We call God, Father, because that is the way the Scriptures address Him. That doesn’t mean God is male. The Bible is clear that God is not gendered. See Hos 11:3-4, 13:8, Deut 32:11-12, 18; Is 42:14, 49:15, 66:13, Psalm 131:2

Instead of putting on God the problematic issues of bad fathers, we need to learn from Him what a good father looks like and to see His heart of how He deeply desires to be the good father you are searching for.

B. Culture:

Sitcoms up until the 1990’s centred around the character of a good father. Ex. Leave it to Beaver, Family Ties, Growing Pains. All in the Family is the exception.

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III. Traits of a Good Father: Seen, Soothed, Safe, Secure

Jesus taught us that the primary name we would use for God is Father. He wanted us to relate to God with this particular vision in mind. Jesus told us this story to help us see it.

Luke 15:11-27

John Bowlby a British Psychologist and Psychiatrist, studied the interactions of parents and children to discover why one child grows up feeling insecure, unloved and another feels safe and secure. Daniel Siegel built on his work and came up with 4 hallmarks¹ of what a child needs:

1. To be Seen,
2. To be Soothed,
3. To have a place of Safety,
4. To be Secure.

These 4 aren't everything a child needs. They could possibly use some discipline along the way. But that is secondary. Providing discipline when the foundations of being seen, soothed, safe and secure aren't in place only causes problems.

In our story – God meets these 4 criteria:

1. He sees: A good father sees his children. He knows their quirks, their likes and dislikes. He works to know their personality and shape their character.

Luke 15: 20 – *“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him.”*

Psalm 139:1

2. He Soothes.
A good father is able to see when you are overwhelmed. They comfort without shame. They know what you need to move from distress back to calm.

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Luke 15:20 "His father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

Psalm 23

3. He Provides Safety

A good father provides care and protection. You are more physically safe when he is around. You are emotionally safe – able to pour out the most nasty complaints and thoughts and still be loved. A good father loves no matter what and provides a predictable home base. They will be with you in your struggle.

Safety does not mean nothing bad with ever happen. We live in a dangerous, troubled world. This week children that are well loved fell off the trampoline, skinned their knees, got concussions, broke bones. A good parent is with you in that struggle.

Emotional safety means you are allowed to voice what you are feeling without fear that your Father will walk away and leave you in your angst. The laments in the Psalms make up over half of the Psalms. They are prayers of God's people crying out for justice, in sadness...and He always hears the cry of his children. Ps. 34: 17
Safety is the place where you are no longer in survival mode but can rest and digest because someone is with you.

Luke 15:21-24

4. He Provides Security

A secure child is able to explore more than one that is insecure. They trust in the relationship and that you will be there. They aren't caught up in matters of survival and can take risks. Their parent's confidence in them helps them develop confidence in themselves. They know what a healthy relationship feels like and they are able to form it with others. They know someone greater than them is in charge of the bigger picture. Luke 15:31 His future on Dad's farm was secure. Our good Father does not abandon us. Ps 121. Ps 27

God is a Good Father and viewing him as such has potential to change your life in many ways.

IV. Living as A Child of the Father

A. Changes Your Identity

As a child of God the Father, you are given a clear picture of what you growing up into. We are to become the likeness of Jesus as he is the likeness of the Father. We are to be doing what He does, loving as he loved, forgiving as He forgave. That's our goal - to walk like he would in your shoes, in your situation, in your community. What would Jesus be up to?

B. Changes Your Behaviours

1. Changes your negative coping strategies. If you don't believe God is soothing or safe, we are left stuck in our own negative coping strategies.

"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matt 11:28. God has filled creation with places and spaces that provide soothing and safety - gardens and rivers, lakes and mountains. All the false soothing that the world offers doesn't satisfy in the long term.

2. You can stop hiding. Since Adam and Eve we have been hiding when we fail. And our father hasn't stopped looking for us. You have a Father mourning the loss of connection with you. Yearning to bring you back to life. When you believe God is a God who wants to soothe you, you no longer approach him with fear. We become like loved children crawling up on his lap.

Romans 8:14 - *Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father,".*

C. Changes Your Prayer Posture.

Jesus in the Lord's Prayer taught us to address God as 'Our Father' (Mt 6:9). Viewing God as Father puts an end to "I don't know how to pray. I don't know what to say.

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D. Changes how your respond to others.

Once you experience the life changing love of the Father, you can then offer that to others.. Everyone needs to be seen, soothed, safe and secure and that should be your posture

E. Changes Your Purpose

This life isn't about performance. Romans 8:15,16 The Message: *"This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?" God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance!*

What if we approached each day like that, our eyes pop open and before we're even aware of where it hurts or all the things we have to do - our attitude is... Hey, Dad. What do you got for me today?

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Personal Reflection

1. What makes a good dad? What dads, fictional or real, influenced your view of Fatherhood?
2. Has your experience with your earthly father shaped the way you relate to God?
3. When you fail, struggle, or drift away, what story do you tell yourself about how God sees you?
4. How could experiencing God as your loving Abba Father change the way you live, pray, or respond to someone this week?

Prayer

Consider what is means to be seen, soothed, safe and secure. Which of those do you feel the most in need of. Take those thoughts to your Abba Father.

Consider starting your day with the prayer from Romans 8:15 – What’s next Dad?

REFLECTION

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¹ Siegel, Daniel J., and Bryson, Tina Payne. (5 January 2021). The Power of Showing Up: How Parental Presence Shapes Who Our Kids Become and How Their Brains Get Wired. Ballantine Books.