

life groups discussion guide

God is . . . a Father



LIFE GROUPS
doing life together

"My father gave me the greatest gift anyone could give another person, he believed in me."

— Jim Valvano

"I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection."

— Sigmund Freud

Being a Parent

I heard an interview with a woman who was relating the story of visiting with her father at his death bed and asking if he had any sage wisdom to impart, being now so close to the end and looking his mortality right in the face. His words were, indeed, very wise – and they have application beyond their original intent. The father looked into his daughter's eyes and told her: "Everyone knows they're dying...but no one thinks they're dying."

And that's the rub, isn't it. There are things that we know, either instinctively or through learning, that we can fail to understand in their fullness. There is quite a bit of difference in knowing you're dying and thinking that you're dying. There is a difference in the depth, and personal application of the knowledge.

Q :: Think for a moment. Can you think of other instances where you knew something, but didn't fully grasp it on the deeper, more personal level?

Q :: Let's consider this idea of knowing that you're dying, without thinking that you're dying. If, with the thinking comes a deeper understanding of what's at stake, how might that deeper understanding impact us – what fruit might it bear?

Now, I think this is where we pick up on the God is our Father story. I think as a post-New Testament believer, we've all heard the Lord's Prayer enough times that we know that God is our Father, but we very well may fail to think He's our Father. And, in this case as well, I think there is a profound difference in those two positions.

But if you go back before Jesus taught us to see God's role in our lives as that of a Father, you find that this portrayal is surprisingly rare. In the Old Testament, God is specifically called the Father of the nation of Israel (Deut 32:6 ; Isa 63:16 ; [twice] 64:8 ; Jeremiah 3:4 Jeremiah 3:19 ; 31:9 ; Mal 1:6 ; 2:10) or the Father of certain individuals (2 Sam 7:14 ; 1 Chron 17:13 ; 22:10 ; 28:6 ; Psalm 68:5 ; 89:26) only fifteen times.

The teaching of the Fatherhood of God takes a decided turn with Jesus, for "Father" was his favorite term for addressing God. It appears on his lips some sixty-five times in the Gospels and over 100 times in John. Jesus even went as far as to not only call God "Father" – but to call him *Abba*, which connotes a level of intimacy more akin with the English word "Daddy". Digging deeper into that word, I found something illuminating...and wonderful:

"It is easier to explain Abba using the Italian language by looking at the word "Papa". This is a real word very young children use for their Fathers and is pretty easy for them to say and is a term of great love and endearment. However, the very same word "Papa" is used for the Pope, someone the Italians particularly hold in great esteem. The word Papa therefore holds huge honour and a magnificence and reverence in that context and one of great intimacy and familiarity in the other."

Q :: God wants us to know BOTH the intimacy of Him like a small child does with their Daddy, but also to understand that our Daddy is the Creator of the universe. Do you think it's common to know that sort of vastness of information about our earthly fathers?

Q :: God is far from one-dimensional. He can, and does, play many different roles in our lives. Share some of the roles God plays in your life and how He does so.

Q :: Romans 8:15 states “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” Do you have the sort of intimacy with God where you can address Him in such intimate terms as “Daddy” or “Papa”? If not, why?

Q :: It has been widely said that our view of God can be largely impacted by the kind of relationship we had with our earthly father. But rather than rehash the flaws of our fathers, I think we would be wise to perhaps set our expectation of what our relationship with our heavenly Father might be on the relationship Jesus had with Him. In what ways do we see God acting in His Fatherly role with Jesus?

There are many things that an earthly father should bring to the table. Here's is just a partial list:

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| - Authority | - Attentiveness |
| - Faithfulness | - Acceptance |
| - Generosity | - Love |
| - Affection | - Provision |

Q :: Given that list, what would you add to it in terms of what you feel earthly fathers should provide – or – what do you see God bring to the table as a Father that is not on this list?

Q :: Did having children give you any new insights into God's role as a Father to you – or into your role as His dearly loved child? If so, please share.

Q :: What might be the practical outgrowth of a full understanding of the significance of our heavenly parentage? In other words, what changes might we see if we commit to thinking more about God being our Father – or, better yet, our Daddy.

Conclusion:

Knowing that God is Our Father is much more than just knowing some verses from the Bible – it is one of the most wonderful revelations in all of Scripture; it is a truth that should change our lives.

Consider how you might make a shift this week – even today – from just intellectually knowing that God is your Father, and actually allowing that truth to soak deep into you on a personal level and impact your relationship with Him as never before.

I remember reading the book *Downpour* by James MacDonald years ago and being supremely moved – and changed – by the picture it paints of the holiness of God. It, likewise, was a case of knowing God was holy, and thinking God was hold. And it did impact me in very deep way. It fundamentally changed the way I approach God.

I have a feeling that if we allow these truths about God being our Father, and the richness that this truth holds within itself, to really soak into us at a more personal level, that we would be fundamentally and powerfully impacted. I mean if we don't just know it, but really think about it.

I'll conclude with a prayer that pretty much says it all. I found the prayer as part of a study online, but it is well worth copying and appropriating into my life – and I hope yours as well.

“Loving Heavenly Father, the Bible tells me of Your abundant love and care for me. Please forgive me for any wrong ideas I have about You as my Father. Renew my mind and correct my thinking, so that I might delight in Your love as much as You delight in loving me. Amen.”