

# Small Groups

## SERMON-BASED STUDY GUIDE

Father's Day – “*Abba*” (Guest speaker Kevin Butcher)

June 18, 2023

### DIGGING IN:

1. Kevin began his message by saying “If you don’t have a loving dad, the consequences can be disastrous.” What have you seen, either in your own life or the lives of people around you, that would support this statement? (What are some of the consequences you have seen?)
2. “We all have a deep longing for another kind of father, even if we had a good dad!”
  - Why do you think this is?
  - I have heard it said that “God is not like your father; God is like the father you always wished you had!” What are the qualities we long for (and may or may not have had) in a father?

### MAKING IT REAL:

“At the core of many of our spiritual struggles, stealing our joy, freedom, security, power, is a heart longing to know God as loving Father. . . but feeling him to be someone else.”

3. When you look at God, who do you see? Which of these descriptions best fits the way you tend to see God? Or, add your own description if none of these fit.
  - CEO of the Universe
  - Cosmic Professor
  - Spiritual Chief of Police/Harsh Judge (“always scouring our lives for screw-ups)
  - Demanding Parent
4. How have the following affected your view of who God is and/or your ability to know God as your Father?
  - Your relationship (or lack thereof) with your father
  - Teaching/advice you received from other believers or the church
  - Your own life experiences

5. Read Romans 8:15 (below) several times. (You can have several people in your group each read it, slowly and thoughtfully).

Kevin pointed out three movements within this verse. After reading the verse out loud several times, respond to each of the three movements. (Provide pens/paper so that your group members can write their responses).

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

- **Abba (God the Father) sees me living in bondage and fear.** ("The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again."). In what areas of your life do you sense bondage and fear? Write them down. How does it feel to know that God see you there? (If you have built up trust with your group, share these responses with one another).
- **Abba chooses me, out of love, to be His own.** ("the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.") As Kevin said, "He chose me in history past, and today He chooses me again." How does it feel to know that Father God *chooses* you? Write your response to Him. Share it with your group if you wish.
- **Abba whispers, "From now on, cry out to me, 'Abba, Father!'"** ("And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."). *Guide your group through this silent prayer process, with eyes closed: Read the elements of the prayer slowly, allowing plenty of time for each one.* (You might open this with a prayer asking God to silence our own thoughts, silence the enemy's voice, and allow us to experience only Him.)
  - Are you able to cry out to God as your Abba? He has invited you into this relationship, is inviting you to run to him.
  - Imagine yourself as a little child, lifting your arms to the Father to cry out. Raise your hands to Him, knowing that He receives you. What is the cry of your heart that you want Him to hear? Speak it to Him.
  - Imagine Him lifting you up into His arms and holding you close as He responds to your cry. What is the expression on His face? What do you feel?
  - What does He say to you?
  - Allow a few minutes for group members to write down their thoughts from the prayer experience. If they are comfortable you can talk about the experience as a group.

A reminder:

Discovering and experiencing God as Father is a healing *process*:

- Be patient and gentle with yourself.
- Begin to explore your formative years (so that you can understand more of how your father affected your view of God).
- Experiencing Abba's love will bring the deepest healing.

## PRAYER IDEAS

Continue to pray into the idea of God as Father. Consider praying blessings over each other in the group.

## WANT TO DIG A LITTLE DEEPER?

Use [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) or [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) to look up references to God as Father. Write down what you learn about Him in each instance. Then write your response to Him.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*How to Give a Blessing:* <https://tinyurl.com/yckmtyyt>

*Continue the Prayer Process:* A longer, more personalized prayer process to engage you with how your human relationships have affected your view of God as Father, is on the following page. (This would be used individually, not as a group).

*Red Couch Theology Podcast*

If you or group members have questions around parts of the sermon that are not included in the discussion guide, it's always helpful to listen to *Red Couch Theology*, where Alex and Aaron talk about the sermon and answer questions that come in from people in the congregation. <https://guysdrinkingtea.podbean.com/>

## **Prayer Project – Attachment to God:** (Allow an hour or more for this process)

(quoted from materials received at the Denver Seminary Spiritual Direction Certificate Program. Author unknown).

**Centering** - take at least 5 minutes to connect with yourself; turn your attention to your breathing; notice any sensations/feelings in your body; turn your attention toward God, inviting God into this time and space with you. Engage with yourself and God in the following prompts. Notice any changes in your body or emotions.

**Noticing** - Spend 15-30 minutes holding before God your childhood narrative.

Notice any memories that come to mind, feelings that arise, and sensations in your body. Allow yourself to imagine your childhood self. What age are you in your imagination? What feelings do you notice toward your childhood self? What feelings does God have toward him/her?

Consider your early attachment relationships (e.g., mother, father, important others). How would you describe these relationships? In what ways have they contributed to ways that you relate to yourself and others?

What have been the major images or mental representations of God, both positive and negative, that have played a significant role in your life. Feel free to draw them or describe them in any way that feels appropriate. Trace any connections between those images of God and the human relationships which may have shaped those representations.

Consider the following:

- What was your emotional life like at that age?
- How did you get your emotional needs met?
- How did your caregivers (e.g., mother, father) respond to your inner world (emotions, dreams, needs, creativity, etc.)? To what degree did you “feel felt”?
- In times of emotional distress, to whom did you go for comfort? What was their response? How did it affect you?
- How were emotions communicated in your family of origin? To what degree did this shape your relationship with your emotions, and your ways of communicating your emotions as an adult?
- What was conflict like in your family of origin? How did it end? To what degree was their repair after ruptures?

**Reflect** - After praying through some of these questions -> ask yourself, and God: To what degree have these experiences affected how you relate to God? What are the similarities/differences between how you related to your mother/father (caregiver) and how you relate to God? How does may reflect aspects of your attachment status/style?