

We Cry, “Abba”

Of all the attributes of God that have potential for misunderstanding in today's 'dictionary', perhaps "Father" heads the list. If not so already, fatherhood is quickly becoming a grotesquely deviated concept (generally speaking) compared to what it truly means and especially as it pertains to God. Men have perverted the picture of fatherhood.

I need to be somewhat blunt here to make a point. In the desperately wicked societies of the ancient land of Canaan, it was common for children to be burned alive upon the incandescent arms of the idol Moloch or to be buried alive in the foundation of a new building – all for the attainment on the part of the parents of greater pleasure. Today, as you know, children are tortured and then murdered while still in the womb or in the birth canal, and it too is promoted by an insanely pleasure-oriented society. In many places, children are sold into prostitution or slavery. Meanwhile, in utter cowardice, some fathers are even sending their little children into battle (eight, ten and twelve year olds) – urging them to throw rocks at tanks and teaching them to wear explosive vests.

In our own backyard, to a greater and greater extent, fathers and guardians are abandoning their children. Just yesterday, a two-year old was left alone to wander the streets of Bakersfield. He couldn't even say much more than his name! His father and mother are nowhere to be found. A few days earlier, another man just walked into a convenience store in Sacramento with his little child and then (caught on tape) left without him, abandoning him in the store.

And this is not worst of it; it's only the tip of the iceberg. What's happening in many homes is frankly too disgusting to describe. Children are morally abandoned – left to decide under the mentoring of our 'family-friendly' media what's right and what (if anything) is wrong.

A decade ago, the number of murders committed by teens was approximately 1000 a year, whereas today it is 4000 a year. More than 70% of all juveniles in state reform institutions come from fatherless homes. Because of a lack of father figures in the home -- in the past 30 years there have been:
550% increase in violent crime
400% increase in illegitimate births
200% increase in teen pregnancies
300% increase in teen suicide

All of this stems from a failure in fatherhood. It's no wonder people have difficulty sometimes in relating to a heavenly Father! To more and more folks, children are a pleasure handicap, a burden, even a plague. With the advent of myriad birth control measures, sex has become increasingly an inconsequential pastime rather than a marital privilege. Sadly, men and women are playing God in determining whether and when to have children. Do I sound radical? I haven't even started.

This is absolutely NO accident, friends. One of the prime reasons people don't come to God is because the concept of a loving Father is under assault continuously. Just as marriage is supposed to be a picture of Christ's relationship to the Church so parenting is supposed to picture Father God's relationship to His children. When people don't see and understand that picture they behave as spiritual orphans. Anger, hopelessness, carnality, denial of the

truth and hardness of heart become their means of dealing with it. The Bible says, "*Taste and see that the Lord is good.*" but many won't do that simply because it never comes across as a reasonable option – the concept of a good Father is unimaginable.

Let me suggest that when the scripture says, "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God...*" (John 1:12) it speaks not only of the born-again experience but of becoming SONS of God – that is, seeing God more and more clearly as He is – your **Father** – your ever loving, forgiving, compassionate, helping, protecting, totally holy and awesome Father. It is in that understanding that the relationship is formed and it is in that relationship that the understanding grows.

As believers, we seem to more clearly comprehend that Jesus, who lived among us, knows us – our hopes, our travails, our pains, and our grief. "*He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*" (Isa 53:3) But I'll not forget one thing I learned not too long ago – I had recently experienced God taking my dear young son to His side. My faith was weak, and I was convulsing in grief over it. One morning, as I tried to pray and stared blankly into the nothingness, I was reminded of how deeply I had wanted to help my boy – that if they would have been able to take my own heart and lungs, I would instantly have given them to him. If I could only have taken his place in that sterile hospital room, I gladly would have. It destroyed me and my wife that we couldn't help him.

Then, as pain and anger beat upon my soul, I 'heard' a still soft voice within saying something like, 'You wanted to save him but you couldn't –

I wanted to save Him but I couldn't. Now, in this fellowship of suffering, you begin to know Me and the pain I've felt.' That realization changed my perspective. Father God wasn't simply turning His back on Jesus while He hung on the cross. I suggest He may have felt like I did – powerless. Now, don't misunderstand me – God is all powerful! But in order to save us, He had to surrender His beloved Son to the incomprehensibly hellish role of the slaughtered Lamb. His infinite love over ruled His infinite power, indescribable grief and justified wrath. If you've believed that somehow God just stood back or turned His back or in any way simply detached Himself from Jesus until it was over, that He perhaps occupied Himself with other things or that He simply rested upon His throne because He knew the final outcome – you've missed it.

Jesus is God made man – fully God and fully man. He and the Father are one. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief – what then does that tell us about our Father? God's omniscience and omnipotence does not make Him the least bit stoic – that's ancient Greek nonsense. I'm convinced God's heart ached in infinite sadness and grief over the crushing and bruising of His only begotten Son. That's part of the heart of a Father.

God's Father-heart is pure and perfect. We truly have nothing to compare to it in our humanity because we're a fallen humanity. Many of us have had great parents and many have not. But regardless, none of us I dare say, have seen and understood the parental picture of Father God – "*we see through a glass darkly*" (1Cor 13:12) "*Give me a worm that can understand a man, and I will give you*

a man who can understand God.”—
John Wesley

Let’s consider God’s name or attributes as He declared in Ex 34:6, 7 – “*And the LORD passed before him (Moses) and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."*

God’s Father-heart toward you is revealed in His Name –

The **LORD** – The eternally existent one – unchanging and perfect. Absolutely worthy of the ultimate in ‘parental respect’. You can look up to Him in total confidence.

The **LORD God** – Infinitely powerful and thus able to handle ANY problem, ANYTHING that would come against you.

Merciful – From everlasting to everlasting is His mercy upon His children. Though there are surely consequences to sin, HE has not dealt with us according to our iniquities. He doesn’t give us what we deserve.

Gracious – He gives us what we don’t deserve! Along with Father God’s totally unbalanced good nature is His desire to bless His children. None of us deserve it and that’s the point. This is grace.

Longsuffering – This King James word here is great because it speaks of our Father’s understanding as well as His patience. He is never moody – He never disciplines because of anger though angry He may get. His discipline is always for our good, never because He’s ‘having a bad day’.

Goodness – You can just keep going and going and going on the goodness graph and never stops. The Bible says repeatedly, He is good. There’s no darkness in Him, nothing bad. It is surely beyond our human experience to fathom that, but it’s true. He’s completely good.

Truth – Did you know that God has limited Himself? Yes, He cannot lie. And not only that, but He is ‘all truth’ – His understanding and application of what is true is pure and without any malicious intent. He is abounding in truth and we have so very little appreciation for it. We dwell in a world of deception – I’m convinced that in heaven we will be utterly astounded by the beauty of this God of Truth.

Keeping Mercy and Forgiving – He does not think like a man – He absolutely loves to forgive. It’s not difficult for Him. You may return time after time after time to His embrace and never hear Him say, “That’s it. You’ve just blown it one time too many. I just can’t take it anymore.” No, He keeps on keeping on. Jesus even told his disciples in Luke 17:4 concerning a brother who needs forgiveness, “*And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you saying, "I repent," you shall forgive him.*”

Visiting Iniquity – I think the translators did a poor job here and it has led to much error. The translations can leave you thinking that there’s no way God clears the sinner of guilt and in fact He makes the sinner’s children and grand children and even great grandchildren pay the price for inherited sin. Some people even get generational curses out of this. Whoa!

Let’s go to the original language and see what it is really saying – Father

God does not permissively pretend that sin didn’t happen or that it isn’t that bad. Unlike man, he doesn’t give it a new name to clean it up. Lust is not love, homosexuality is not gay, murder in the womb is not freedom of choice. He chastises, yet the chastisements of God are because He loves us.

Our sin, though, is indeed cleared – completely cleared by the blood of Christ. Now, sin can have its effects upon offspring – that’s true. However, Ez 18:20-22 makes it absolutely simple and plain that no one is responsible for the sin of their parents. It says, “*The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.*”²¹ “*But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die.*”²² “*None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live.*”

You see, what is being said here is that God is so faithful and so loving that He will never wash His hands of His children. He’ll never say, “Oh, they just keep on sinning. I’m fed up with it and so I’m just going to let them go. I’m not going to attend to it.” That word “visit” means in the original language to attend, to care for it. God’s going to deal with our sin, even though it persists generation after generation. You see, He’s our Father.

And there is another name we must consider as well.

It is used once by Christ in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36), once by Paul to describe the relationship with God we sense in the Spirit (Rom 8:15) and once to describe how the Spirit cries out within us to God (Gal 4:6). It is each time used in conjunction with “Father”. This is the name “**Abba**”.

Vine’s Dictionary says, “*In the Gemara (a Rabbinical commentary on the Mishna, the traditional teaching of the Jews) it is stated that slaves were forbidden to address the head of the family by this title. It approximates to a personal name, in contrast to "Father," with which it is always joined in the NT. Abba is the word framed by the lips of infants, and betokens unreasoning trust; "father" expresses an intelligent apprehension of the relationship. The two together express the love and intelligent confidence of the child.*” Easton’s says, “*It is a term expressing warm affection and filial confidence. It has no perfect equivalent in our language.*”

In His deepest trial, Christ cried out, “Abba, Father.” The Holy Spirit instructs that this is the appropriate name for us to use as well. You might think of it as “Papa” or “Daddy” – a term of endearment rather than a title. In the final analysis – God doesn’t expect you to truly fathom His Fatherhood or even to fully appreciate His awesome attributes, but He does want you to understand deep within your heart that He’s your real “Dad”, your tender-loving “Papa” – your “Abba, Father.” If you let Him, He will bring this to fuller and fuller realization especially as you face difficult trials. Abba truly knows far more than you realize your joy, your grief, your emptiness, your fullness. He’s not the image of father you’ve always held – He’s much more. He’s Abba, Father.