

## **LESSON 4**

### **The Father Heart of God**

In this lesson, we are again going to examine the nature of God in how he relates to us, and we to him. God is not a distant lord and harsh dictator, who is unapproachable and uninterested in us. Rather, he desires a very close and personal relationship with us, born out of his holiness and love.

(If you have never read the first three chapters of the Bible – Genesis 1-3 – it would be helpful for you to do so now before you continue reading this lesson.)

#### **The origin and value of relationships**

The most important thing in life is relationships. This is a maxim of which our present generation seems largely ignorant. Many of us grow up in dysfunctional families. Good relationship skills are not modelled in our homes. Relationships are discarded all too readily. We just do not understand the significance of relationships.

The express reason for which we were created was relationship. God who is a community – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – made a decision to create a being who would be able to connect with him in community. Adam was created a righteous being, which is a spiritual being fashioned after God's own likeness, in order that he might enter into, and live his life in the context of, a perfect relationship with the Godhead.

God did not stand afar and watch Adam being manufactured on some assembly line. God fashioned him with his own hands and breathed his own breath of life into him. It was an act of incredible intimacy by God, right from the very outset.

Adam was the pinnacle of God's creation and given supremacy over all creation. However, his role in exercising dominion over the world was to be outworked in the context of a vital union with his Creator. Although Adam was given a job to do – tend the garden, subdue the earth and together with Eve procreate and raise a family – his primary purpose was not to fulfil these tasks. He was made to enjoy intimate relationship with God, to really know God. It was God's good pleasure to accomplish this for, in turn, God could enjoy that intimacy himself with the product of his own love.

Moreover, the express purpose for which Eve was created was for relationship. In all the animal kingdom there was no suitable created being for which Adam could enjoy relationship – a sense of real connectedness. Eve was provided by God to be Adam's completer. And together as they lived in intimacy with one another and with God, they would produce offspring who would also enter that community of love.

God wanted a world of sons and daughters, to which he would prove a warm, tender, kind and affectionate Father. That relationship was to be eternal, born out of love and sustained by love. The family of God was to be a beautiful, strong and healthy community with God as its rightful Head.

### **The origin and intent of sin**

When Adam sinned, he made a conscious decision to break relationship with God. It was not the eating of the fruit itself, but what that action was defined to represent. Adam understood he had a clear choice. He could remain in relationship with God (accepting and submitting to God and his authority) or choose to live independently from him (rejecting God and rebelling against his authority). The latter was made effective by a defined action -

eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It was like a binding signature at the bottom of divorce documents.

The result of Adam's wilful choice to break relationship with God was devastating upon all parties. God's heart was broken by Adam's rejection. God grieved when Adam wilfully disobeyed. The product of his own love was casting him aside, counting his friendship worthless.

Adam was now estranged from God. The righteousness he had possessed, because he was made in the image of God and walked with God, had now been lost. He took on a new nature, a dark nature. He was now an unrighteous being. This nature no longer produced a righteous life but a life of sin. A sin nature will always produce sinful behaviour. In turn, sinful behaviour will always produce bad consequences for interpersonal relationships.

### **The basic need for relationships**

Just as a light bulb was made to produce light by the power of electricity, man was made for relationship in and through the energizing power of God. When Adam sinned it was as if the switch was turned off. Power to live in right relationship therefore ceased at that very moment.

It is not that the desire or need for right relationship was now also extinguished. This is the basic dilemma for sinful man. He is made for relationship, however, his own dark nature forces him to do things which are harmful to relationships. He has an innate need to live in harmony with God and others but, however he tries, he cannot succeed independently of God. Just as it would prove impossible for a light bulb to generate light of itself without the

power supplied by electricity, man cannot live in right relationships without being connected to God.

The bottom line in all the worldly pursuits of man – power, possessions and passion – is to fill the need for relationship. To earn the approval of others and thereby win their affection. True love, however, can never and will never be bought by human effort. True love is born out of righteousness and is a gift.

The great message of the Bible is how God implemented a plan by which man could come back into right relationship with him. How man could again be made righteous and thereby enter into right relationship with God. The consequence that flowed from establishing the *vertical* relationship with God, was the impact upon *horizontal* relationships with others. These too would come into line with God's original plan and purpose.

### **The Father Heart of God**

The primary way that God reveals himself to us in relationship is as a loving Father. Oftentimes, however, the concept of God being a father evokes feelings of anger, resentment and rejection. The way that our earthly father has treated us has created emotional wounds which act as hindrances to our comprehension of the Father heart of God. Unless we accept as true that God is a loving father, who wants to help us always and never to abuse us, then we can never come into a place of intimate relationship with him. We will always distance ourselves from him.

Jesus' own disciples had difficulty comprehending the true nature of God. Near the end of Christ's time upon the earth, after the disciples had walked with him some three years, Philip, one of the younger, quieter, and perhaps thoughtful of the disciples plucks up

enough courage to ask Jesus *"Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."*[1] Jesus' replied:

*"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me ..."*

John 14:8-10

Philip was blind to the fact that Jesus had been revealing the nature and heart of God all the time. Philip's concept of God as Father was something different from the truth. To observe Jesus was to observe the Father himself. (This demonstrates again the Trinitarian nature of God - the Son is the exact representation of the Father, as the Father is the exact representation of the Son, Hebrews 1:3 says *"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word ..."*) God was not distant, cruel and uncaring. He was ever-present, immeasurably kind and full of compassion – just as Jesus had shown himself to be.

Philip missed it because of his wrong understanding about the nature of God. He had to change his thinking. In effect, Jesus told him *"Philip, you have to change your perception of the Father. The Father is just like me. You have to believe me when I tell you this. You must change your old and wrong ways of thinking about him. He is not like what you have been led to believe. When you look at me, you are looking at the image of the Father."*

Here are some of the characteristics of God as revealed in Jesus Christ:

Patient	2 Peter 3: 15
Perceptive	Matthew 19: 16-26
Considerate	John 2:1-11, 19:25-27
Compassionate	Matthew 9: 26
Caring	John 21: 16
Tender	John 12:1-8
Gracious	John 4: 22
Forgiving	Matthew 9: 2
Just	John 8: 3-11
Good	Mark 10: 17-18
Holy	John 6: 69
Self-sacrificing	John 15: 13
Steadfast	John 18: 37
Committed	Mark 1: 38
Truthful	John 8: 45
Listening	Matthew 15: 22-28
Kind	Titus 3: 4
Forgiving	Luke 23: 34
Merciful	Mark 5: 19
Sympathetic	Luke 18:15-17
Generous	Matthew 14:13-21, 15:30-38
Strong	Matthew 17:14-21
Wise	Matthew 17:24-27
Mighty	Mark 4:35-41
Loving	1 John 3: 16

**God as Father and as Judge**

When God first created Adam he revealed himself only as a loving Father. There was no need for God to act as Judge because there was no sin. And because there was no sin, neither therefore was there death. The theory of evolution, with millions of years of death and suffering before 'Adam', is a falsehood. Adam never experienced anything that was bad because everything God had made was good. Adam never felt pain or suffering, nor did he observe these things in the world around him. No animal attacked another; all of the beasts ate plants.[2] There was neither disease nor death. Pain, suffering and death appeared only after Adam sinned.

So everything Adam first observed and experienced, only confirmed the goodness of God. Although Adam had no experience of God as Judge, God made him fully aware of the consequences that would flow from him breaking relationship. Before the fall, Adam could not know the experience of death as judgment, he only had God's word on it.

God was not a tyrannical dictator who demanded Adam's complete obedience against his will. God made Adam with a free will, in order to be able to love. Love is a gift which cannot be earned or bought. Adam was free to love God or reject God. The only requirement God stipulated that would prove Adam's desire to remain in relationship, was not to eat the fruit from one particular tree, amongst a menagerie of trees that carried all manner of delicacies.

**Satan lied about the nature of God**

The subsequent details of Adam's fall shows us how Satan employed a damnable lie to trick Eve, which she in turn used to

convince Adam, to break relationship with God. His lie went to the heart of first the nature and character of God, and secondly to their own identity.

*"... He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"*

*"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God ..."*

Genesis 3:1-5

In effect Satan was declaring God to be a liar. They wouldn't die as God had led them to believe. Terrible consequences wouldn't eventuate if they ate the fruit. God was withholding from them something which was good. Therefore, the only logical inference they could draw, was that God himself was evil. Satan's portrayal of the nature of God was the complete antithesis of who he really was and the complete opposite of what Adam and Eve had experienced him to be.

### **Satan lied about the nature of man**

As to their own natures, Satan employed another lie. Although they were created in the image of God and therefore were like God, Satan's temptation carried with it the direct inference that they were not like God. God was therefore deceiving them in order to stop them from doing the one thing that would enable them to become like him. At present they were inferior to God. If they



opposed him, however, and did what he said not to do, they would become equal to him.

Adam had a clear choice to either believe Satan or believe God. It is utterly amazing and almost incomprehensible why it appears that he didn't take time to think it through, or to call upon God to answer these accusations. Adam all too quickly bought the lie. Nevertheless, he was fully aware of the consequences of his actions. Irrespective of whether what God said was true or not, he was deliberately choosing to live independently of God. To attempt to become an equal with God was to establish another throne separate from God's rule and thereby a grab to obtain absolute independence.

### **The consequences of Adam's disobedience**

When Adam sinned declaring his relationship with God severed, God was forced to adopt a position which he never wanted to assume. He now became Judge. Whereas Adam had only experienced his love, now God had to mete out hard cold justice upon him.

The intimate relationship they had experienced was now shattered. Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden. Toil, pain, sorrow, suffering and death were now their lot. And the whole earth came under a curse in bondage to decay.

Moreover, they had sacrificed what Satan deceitfully said they would get. They were originally made in the likeness of God. They couldn't have become more like him and yet that is the ruse Satan used: *"your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God ..."*. When they sinned they lost the nature of God and took on an unrighteous nature, like that of Satan. And righteous God and unrighteous man

could not now dwell in intimate relationship. They were now entirely different beings. God could no longer be the Father he wanted to be.

(The outworking of sin in the human race was swift and terrible. Adam and Eve's first son, Abel, was murdered by his brother, Cain. By just the ninth generation, the world had become full of violence and the inclination of people's hearts was only to evil, so God sent a world-wide judgement destroying everyone and everything except for Noah and his family, and the animals preserved on the Ark.)

### **The consequences of the Jesus' obedience**

The central message of the cross is the necessity and means by which unrighteous man could be made righteous again and thereby come back into relationship with God. God's plan was to present himself as a substitute, to allow his punishment to fall upon himself in order to win man back.[3] He who knew no sin became sin for us, so that we who believe might become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.[4]

Accordingly, and one of the most wonderful results of being saved, is that the role of God now changes back to what he was before the fall of man. He is no longer our Judge, he is now again our Father. That is why Romans 8:1 declares "*Therefore, there is now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus*" and in verse 15, "*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, **"Abba, Father."***" ("Abba" means Daddy - the affectionate term a little child uses for their father.) We are no longer under the judgement of God. God is not our Judge, he is our Father and he wants us to walk in intimate relationship with him.

### **Obedience is learned**

If God is our Father then we must obey him in all things. He knows what is right and proper for us. He is the source of all wisdom and authority. Obedience is learned through experience. The Bible says that Jesus *“learned obedience”*.<sup>[5]</sup> This is not to say that Jesus failed at any point, because he was without sin.<sup>[6]</sup> Nevertheless, he is the model upon which we are to pattern ourselves. You can only walk according to the light that you have received. Growth is progressive because knowledge of the truth is progressive. Just as a baby grows and becomes an adult over time, so we are transformed into the image of God as we grow up spiritually. Ephesians 4:22-24 explains:

*“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

This putting off and putting on is a learned process. It is inappropriate for us to place performance standards upon ourselves which are impossible to meet, and which lead us into Satan’s trap. When we make a mistake, we need not sense the rejection of God at all. Rather we should run to him. When you fall down you should be like a little child that reaches up their hand to take hold of their father’s outstretched hand, who helps them find their feet again. You should not lie on the floor cringing, waiting for the blow of an angry father’s hand. God is not like that. He can only help you, however, if you put your trust in him and reach out to him. The initiative must come from you. That is why it says in James 4:8, *“Come near to God and he will come near to you.”*

God can only help you as much as you will allow him to. You can permit the emotions you feel when the pressures of life bear down upon you, to turn from God or turn to God. If you wrongfully blame him for your circumstances and are angry towards him, you will never experience his love. Your attitude based upon a wrong opinion of God will stop you experiencing real friendship with God that he desperately desires for you.

This is not to say that God will allow us to remain in habitual sin. 1John 3:9-10 says:

*“No-one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God ...”*

To consciously and deliberately continue a habit of sin without remorse is impossible for the child of God. When God prompts us to deal with an issue we must respond by repenting and believing that the power of sin is broken, knowing that he wants our best: *“God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness”* and *“the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”* [7] People who claim to be Christians and yet continue to behave like everyone else in the world, without remorse and genuine repentance, are fallen or false converts (they have either deliberately chosen to walk away from Christ and renounce their salvation through words and/or actions, or they were never genuinely converted in the first place). Such persons are condemned as enemies of God.[8] God is angry with them. He remains their Judge, and is not their Father. In the case of fallen converts they have no opportunity to return - their

judgement awaits them (see Hebrews 6:4-8 and 10:26-31). In the case of false converts, they need to repent, turn away from their wickedness, accept the true gospel of Jesus Christ and be genuinely saved.

### **If God is so good, why do bad things happen to Christians?**

There are four reasons: first, Jesus said that we would be persecuted in this world. People will hate us and they will hurt us because we are sons/daughters of God. We cannot escape this kind of trouble in this life. The apostle Paul pleaded with the Lord to stop the persecution that dogged him wherever he went. However, God did not take it away from him nor did he take Paul away from it, rather he gave him strength to endure it. [9]

Secondly, we live in a fallen and corrupted world. It is a world controlled by Satan who seeks to oppress people. We will experience sickness and pain at his hand if we allow him access to our lives. Therefore, we must take a stand against him and his works. We must actively “*resist him*”. [10] We must exercise faith and overcome him. We can escape from this kind of trouble by fighting against it.

Acts 10:38 says

*“... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and ... he went around doing good and healing **all** who were under the power of the devil ...”.*

Jesus demonstrated God’s desire for everyone to be healed. It has always been God’s desire and it will always be, because God does not change. [11]

King David said

*“Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits - who forgives all your sins and heals **all** your diseases”. [12]*

The Bible is full of examples of God’s willingness to heal those who would exercise faith and trust him. There are hundreds of thousands of people (perhaps millions) in the world this very day who have been healed by God. God is not arbitrary. He does not heal one person, and deny another. Everyone who comes to him in faith – though that faith may have to withstand the test of time – will be healed. James 5:14-16 states God's open offer to heal his children who are sick:

*“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up...”*

Thirdly, we are free to make choices, both good and bad. Those choices have consequences. The choices we make today are like seeds that are planted, that cause us to reap a harvest in the future. When King David deliberately chose to commit adultery with Bathsheba and subsequently murdered her husband Uriah, the consequences that flowed were devastating. Although he himself was forgiven, the child who was conceived died, and the sword never left his family.[13] His circumstances were tragic from that time on. On another occasion, in the early church there were two members - Ananias and Sapphira – who deliberately lied to the Holy Spirit and the church, and the consequence was that both their lives were cut short.[14]

God has given us a free-will. We cannot blame him for the actions we take and the results that flow from them. We bear the responsibility. If God were to overturn this law of sowing and reaping, then we would be denied the capacity to choose, which would make us mere pawns and robots, and the essence of who God is would no longer be love. (Even in the case of accidents, in which we, or someone else, make innocent as opposed to deliberate choices, there are sometimes very hard consequences that we have to bear.)

Fourthly, in this world God brings judgement against the nations when it is necessary. People who love him will still experience hardship as a consequence of being a member of a nation which is under the judgement of God. Lot was forced to flee his home and live in a cave when God judged Sodom and Gomorrah.[15] Joshua and Caleb spent forty years of their lives tramping around the desert when God judged the nation of Israel for its unbelief and disobedience.[16] Nevertheless, in every example of a righteous person being caught in such circumstances we find that God watches over them to sustain and rescue them.[17]

It is true that God is good, and it is also true that life is not always fair because we live in a fallen world. For this reason, every child of God must learn to trust him in every circumstance. God will sustain and empower them, he will prove himself to be their healer and their source of supply. They must also learn to keep their eyes fixed on eternity, knowing that their lives here upon the earth are very very short, and any trouble that they experience here pales into insignificance to the joy they will experience in heaven for all eternity.

In conclusion, God is the best blood-covenant friend anyone could have - a Father, Saviour, Shepherd, Provider, Healer, Protector, Counsellor, Companion and Guide - but he can only prove himself to someone if they will fully trust him and take him at his Word.

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#### **Lesson 4 Footnotes**

- [1] John 14: 8
- [2] Genesis 1:30
- [3] Isaiah 53:5
- [4] 2Corinthians 5: 21
- [5] Hebrews 5:8
- [6] Hebrews 4:15
- [7] Hebrews 12:10, 6
- [8] James 4:4
- [9] 2Corinthians 12:7-10
- [10] James 4:7, 1Peter 5:9
- [11] Malachi 3:6
- [12] Psalm 103:2-3
- [13] 2Samuel 12:10-14
- [14] Acts 5:1-10
- [15] Genesis 19
- [16] Deuteronomy 1:1-2:7
- [17] Jeremiah 44:4