

“ABBA, FATHER”: WHAT IS HE REALLY LIKE?

All verses are from the New American Standard Bible (NAS) unless otherwise noted.

Underlined> portion of verses are my emphasis, to draw attention to the point that is being made.

The following are synonymous with “Abba, Father”: “God”, “God the Father”, and “heavenly Father”

The words of Jesus are in red.

Affirmation

Lesson 5 – May 25, 2012

Imagine yourself sitting down to a meal prepared just for you by the Lord Jesus Christ. His intention is to honor you as his very special guest, allow you the privilege of enjoying the delights of His culinary skills, while humiliating your enemies who stand around watching. This is the imagery of Psalms 23:5:

New American Standard - You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil ; My cup overflows.

Good News Translation - You prepare a banquet for me, where all my enemies can see me; you welcome me as an honored guest and fill my cup to the brim.

The Message - You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing.

Then imagine the audacity of someone refusing to eat the feast that Jesus has spent considerable time and energy preparing and sat before them. I’m sorry to admit it but I’ve done this many times, and maybe you have to. We will have more to say about this subject later in the lesson.

Introduction:

Have you ever spent time considering what your heavenly Father thinks or feels about you? It certainly is something that we should do, but many might find it rather hard. Many Christians are more sin conscious than they are God conscious, which means that we are more aware of, think more about, our faults and failures than about God and His thoughts about us. Consequently many Christians might be rather fearful of such an exercise, thinking that their heavenly Father doesn’t think very highly of them, that He is angry or mad at all the sinful things he or she has done. Past experiences, poor models, and religious teachings have molded or conditioned us to believe that lie, but the very opposite is the truth; our Abba Father loves us immensely and longs to communicate what He thinks and feels in His heart to each one of His children!

Purpose:

The purpose of this lesson is to show how our heavenly Father affirms His children. If we will just listen we will hear Him speaking words of truth that tell us how much He loves us, how much we mean to Him, and the special place we have in His heart. However, there are several things that will hinder our ability to hear and experience the truth of our heavenly Father’s affirming words:

1. Failure to set aside quiet time to listen to what He has to say.
2. Failure to confess what we’ve heard Him say.
3. Failure to forgive our parents, especially fathers, for their neglect in affirming us.

Affirmation - What It Is And What It Isn’t:

Affirmation is the act of affirming by speaking positive words. It involves validation, which means to recognize, establish, or illustrate the worthiness or legitimacy of someone or something. It is intended to remove doubt in the hearer by stating an indisputable fact. Affirmation involves saying something that is true in a confident way, usually forcefully. When used in relationship of a parent affirming a child it refers to the special unique place the child has in the heart of the parent making the statement. Too often, due to the many responsibilities of parenthood, parents fail consistently to communicate this clearly to each of their children, but assume that each of their children knows they are loved.

Affirmation is not a positive statement based upon what a child did, is doing, or has done; that would be praise, which is a verbal reward when a standard of performance has been reached. Praise is therefore earned by right actions or behavior. Examples of praise and its antonyms (criticize or rebuke) are found in Mat 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27. Children require both unearned affirmation and earned praise. However, child discipline will never accomplish its intended purpose of changing behavior if there isn't first a solid foundation of affirmation provided by the parents. Affirmation can't be earned because of what a child does because it flows out of a heart of love by the parent speaking the words. Affirmation is based upon who the child is, never on what he or she has done or failed to do. Let me illustrate.

Abba Father – The One Who Affirms:

By the age of 12 Jesus already possessed a clear understanding that his life purpose was to be about his heavenly Father's business, but he was not fully released to do that until 18 years later. During those 18 years Jesus learned and grew through all the ordinary trials involved in the maturing process. He had to submit himself to imperfect parents, live with quarreling siblings, learn a trade, how to run a business, and to provide for his mother and siblings after Joseph's death. It was only after reaching the age of 30, when his younger brother was old enough to assume the responsibilities for the family, that Jesus was released by Abba Father to begin his public ministry. Jesus committed himself publically to doing his heavenly Father's will by submitting to baptism. Up until this point, as far as the gospels tell us, Jesus hadn't performed anything worthy of praise; he hadn't preached a sermon, or worked any signs, wonders, healings, or miracles. But note what his heavenly Father had to say at his baptism:

Matt 3:16-17

16 And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, {and} coming upon Him,
17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

(Compare Matt 17:1-8, Mark 9:1-8, Luke 9:28-36, & 2 Pet 1:17-18)

Note that what Abba Father said contained two words of affirmation: "beloved" and "well-pleased". The Greek word translated as "beloved" includes the following ideas: esteemed, dear, favorite, or worthy of love. The Father is telling Jesus very explicitly how much he loves him and the good thoughts He has for him. Five other times the phrase, "My beloved Son" appears in the New Testament, four of them said by the Father, the other by the Apostle Peter who is referring to what the Father said about Jesus.

But what about you and me? Does Abba Father think and feel about us the exact same way He does about Jesus? Are you or I His beloved child? Does He love you and me the same way He does Jesus? The answer to each of these questions is an absolute "YES"! Note the following verses:

John 17:23 NIV **I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**

Jude 1:1 NIV Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ:

(Compare also Rom 1:7, Eph 5:1, Col 3:12, 1 Thess 1:4, & 2 Thess 2:13)

Now to the second word of affirmation translated in Matt 3:17 as "well-pleased". It also means to take pleasure in, or to be favorably inclined towards one. This is not a word of praise based upon what Jesus had done, nor a reward for measuring up to a particular level of performance. It was an affirmation based upon who Jesus was in the heart of his heavenly Father, an authoritative statement of fact for Jesus simply to receive and allow it to dominate the way he thought about himself. Just a casual reading of John's gospel shows that Jesus was totally confident in knowing the special place he held in his heavenly Father's heart.

Again we can ask, But what about you and me? Is Abba Father as well-pleased with us in the same way He was with Jesus? Before answering that I want to make a clear distinction between praise and affirmation that they are totally different with both truths taught throughout the bible. Scripture has much to say about earning praise from God by what a person does right, or God correcting a person for what he does wrong or fails to do when he knows what is the right thing to do. But affirmation by Abba Father is never based on His children's deeds, behavior, or performance (good or bad), but it's always based solely on our heavenly Father's unchanging everlasting love, and the special place that each of His children holds in His heart. It's based upon His nature of love, never upon what we do or fail to do.

Now back to the question, Is Abba Father as well-pleased with us in the same way He was with Jesus? I will answer this with two foundational principles. The first principle is called positional truth, and second is performance truth. Positional truth is who I am in Abba Father's heart that is consistent and never changes, because it's based on who I am in Christ Jesus and how the Father sees me just as He does Jesus: perfect, righteous, complete, and sinless.

Performance truth is completely different; it's a measurement on a scale of 1 to 100 of how I evaluate myself, or others, in living up to the perfect image of thinking and behaving like Jesus. The higher my number the more like Jesus I'm acting. In this life I may seldom reach and stay at a perfect 100 except for short periods of time; most of the time I will fluctuate up and down the scale although I pray and strive diligently to be perfect like Jesus. An example of how this type of fluctuating change of performing can happen within a short period of time is seen in the life of Elijah. One day he is on the mount calling down fire from heaven to consume a sacrifice that had been soaked in 3 barrels of water, but the next day he is running in fear from Jezebel and overcome by depression. Thankfully, Elijah didn't judge himself a failure and leave the ministry because of his negative performance, but continued to serve the Lord successfully knowing the position he held in his heavenly Father's heart.

Performance is the gauge a person uses to judge our own level of spiritual development or maturity, but it will always give us incomplete or wrong information of how Abba Father sees us. The Apostle Paul looked at his up and down performance in Rom 7:13-25, which when solely focused on leads to feelings of self-dissatisfaction and sometimes even self-hatred. Paul learned not to look at his performance, nor to judge himself by that standard (1 Cor 4:3-4). Paul, more than any other New Testament writer, taught that the key was knowing his position of being "in Christ". Of the 91 times that the phrase "in Christ" appears in the New Testament, 87 of them were penned by the Apostle Paul. He had revelation knowledge and understanding that being "in Christ" meant that he held the same position in Abba Father's heart that Jesus did. Paul was very aware that his performance did not consistently match up to the perfection of Jesus' life, but he also knew that no matter how he performed he was always loved and accepted by his heavenly Father because of his position.

"This" Versus "Thou":

Most of us are very familiar with the story of Jesus' baptism having read it many times and think that the story as recorded in the gospels are exactly the same, but they aren't. There is an important distinction between what Matthew recorded and what Mark and Luke recorded. Pay special attention to the underlined portion of the verses below to see if you can catch the difference:

Matt 3:16-17

16 And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, {and} coming upon Him,
17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

Mark 1:10-11 (Also See Luke 3:21-22)

10 And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit

like a dove descending upon Him;
11 and a voice came out of the heavens: "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased."

Matthew records Abba Father's words as "This is ...", as being spoken as a statement or declaration to everyone present. Thus He was publically announcing Jesus to be His Son, and affirming His special love for Jesus so that all those who were in attendance could hear it. But Mark and Luke recorded the Father's words as "Thou art...", which indicates the Father spoke the words directly to Jesus to affirm Jesus' unique relationship of sonship to the Father, and to state strongly the special love Abba Father had for Jesus. These two truths were repeatedly mentioned by Jesus during his public ministry, so it's easy to see how his Father's affirmation influenced Jesus' concept of who he was. If as an adult Jesus needed affirmation, and it seemed that His Heavenly Father knew it was important to give it to Jesus, then guess what? So do each one of us! We desperately need to hear and receive our heavenly Father's affirmation!

The Importance of Affirmation In Developing a God-image:

Every child through the age of 12 needs copious amounts of affirmation, some more than others. The parents, but especially fathers, have the God given responsibility of providing this to each child. It's absolutely essential if the child is going to grow into a person that has a strong God-image like Jesus possessed. Here is a true story of how one 2 year old girl knew how much she needed affirmation and the method she used to draw it out of her daddy:

"Longer, Daddy, Longer..." by John Trent from *Stories For The Heart*

"Recently, a woman grabbed my arm at a conference after I had finished speaking on the enormous need we all have for affirmation.

"Dr. Trent, may I tell you my story?" she asked. "Actually, it's a story of something my son did with my granddaughter that illustrates what you've been talking about--the importance of affirmation.

"My son has two daughters, one who's five and one who is in the 'terrible twos'." When a grandmother says this child is in the "terrible twos," believe me, she is!

"For several years, my son has taken the oldest girl out for a 'date' time, but he had never taken the two-year-old until recently. On his first 'date' with the younger one, he took her out to breakfast at a local fast food restaurant.

"They had just gotten their pancakes and my son decided it would be a good time to tell this child how much he loved and appreciated her."

"Jenny," her son had said, "I want you to know how much I love you, and how special you are to Mom and me. We prayed for you for years, and now that you're here and growing up to be such a wonderful girl, we couldn't be more proud of you."

Once he had said all this, he stopped talking and reached over for his fork to begin eating...but he never got the fork to his mouth

His daughter reached out her little hand and laid it on her father's hand. His eyes went to hers, and in a soft, pleading voice she said, "Longer, Daddy...longer."

He put down his fork and proceeded to tell her some more reasons and ways they loved and appreciated her, and then he again reached for his fork. A second time...and a third...and a fourth time he heard the words, "Longer, Daddy...longer."

This father never did get much to eat that morning, but his daughter got the emotional nourishment she needed so much. In fact, a few days later, she spontaneously ran up to her mother and said, "I'm a really special daughter, Mommy. Daddy told me so."

However, at 12 years of age a child doesn't suddenly lose the need for affirmation. It continues throughout our adult life, but now we need to receive it directly from our Abba Father. If a child

received sufficient amount of affirmation from his father prior to age 12, then as an adult he will easily receive Abba Father's affirmation. But if the child didn't receive sufficient affirmation from his or her earthly father, then it will be difficult as an adult to receive affirmation from his or her Abba Father. Abba Father is more than willing to give each child affirmation if we will just listen and receive it, but we need to know what to do with His affirming words. Let me illustrate by sharing an important truth Abba Father showed me about receiving His affirmations.

Jim's Testimony:

In the previous lesson I told how 1997 was not only one of the most difficult years of my life, but paradoxically also one of the best. It was the best because of the revelation of Abba Father that I was receiving. But my enemies, demonic spirits, were surrounding me, doing everything they could to distract me from that revelation I was receiving. It was during this season that I learned how desperately that the forces of darkness will work to distract a person from the affirmations Abba Father wants to give.

Beginning in 1985 John Wimber's ministry began to impact my life and ministry. One biblical truth he emphasized that really caught my attention was that Jesus only did or said what he saw his Father doing or what he heard his Father say (John 5:19, & 14:49-50). I desperately wanted to follow Jesus' example and understood that to do so it was essential to develop a habit of listening to the Father by getting off alone, quieting my soul and mind, and listening attentively. I began doing this daily and developed a habit that lasted for many years. I quickly learned that Abba Father would speak slowly enough that I could write down what I heard Him say. What I heard varied in length, sometimes it was just one or two sentences to as much as a half of a page on a 8½ x 11 pad. However, I struggled if it was really the Father I was hearing, or if I somehow was manufacturing the words myself, but eventually I began to trust the words were truly from Abba Father.

Periodically during those years I would get upset at what I heard the Father saying, and then I'd throw the pad and pencil down and say, "If that is all You have to say to me, then I don't want to hear it!" Thereafter, I'd quit listening for a few weeks, but eventually the desire would return so once again I'd start listening again with pencil and paper in hand. Why would I get so mad and say such a thing? It was very simple, because the Father wasn't saying what I wanted to hear! I wanted the right thing (hear Him speak), but for the wrong reason (to do miracles and healings like Jesus had done). There is nothing wrong with wanting to do those things, in fact we should wonder if we don't see those kinds of things happening when we minister. However, that should not be the reason we want to spend time with the Father, but rather supernatural manifestations should be the natural outflow of spending time with Him like it was with Jesus. Scripture makes it clear that it's possible to work miracles by following the principle of using the name of Jesus, but yet the person ministering may be rejected because he does not have a vital relationship with Jesus (Matt 7:21-23). So there was a heart issue that the Father wanted to deal with in me that eventually I would find went back to my childhood.

This pattern of getting upset at what I was hearing the Father say continued to repeat itself until one day in September of 1997. Once again I threw the pencil and pad down while saying, "If that is all You have to say, then I don't want to hear it!" I rose up out of the chair to leave the room when suddenly Abba Father spoke words that pierced my heart like a knife. He said, "Jim, your father never affirmed you, that is why you can't receive My affirmations. Until you begin to receive my affirmations, I will have nothing else to say to you!" For years what I'd been hearing the Father say were words of affirmation, but never receiving or appreciating them. I dropped to the floor; crushed with the words I'd just heard, knowing how true they were. At that moment I understood for the first time that although I knew my father loved me, I could not remember him ever saying any affirming words to me. Probably he had never been given affirmations by his earthly father, and therefore was totally unable to share any with me. If we haven't received sufficient affirmations by our earthly father, we are ill-equipped to receive them from our heavenly Father or to share them with our own children.

From that day forward there was a lot of repenting (changes) that I had to do. The work centered around two areas. First was forgiving my earthly father for his failure to affirm me with words that would have communicated that I was his beloved child and that he was pleased with me no matter if I performed up to his expectations or not. His failure had left a large empty space in my heart. Since then I've come to understand that an earthly father's failure to provide affirming words to his children is a sin of neglect. I've also learned that neglect is actually a greater wound than abuse and harder to heal. Abuse is easier to heal because there are specific memories connected to those wounds, but there aren't any specific memories associated with neglect. The person just knows something is missing, that he or she didn't get what they needed as a child to thrive in life, although they may not be able to tell you exactly what they're missing. As adults we seek to fill in a multitude of ways the void in our hearts, but they all lead to dead ends because we seek to earn affirmation through performance. What we are looking for and desperately need can only be filled by our heavenly Father who waits patiently for us to come to Him so He can speak words of affirmations, explaining clearly what we mean to Him, how much He loves us, and the special place we have in His heart.

The second area of my repentance was learning how to receive, or what to do with Abba Father's words of affirmation. First, I began to reply by saying, "Thank You, Father, for those words.", but I began to realize that just wasn't enough. Eventually I began to repeat out loud, to my self, with authority, the words I'd heard Him speak with something like this: "I command my spirit, heart, and soul to listen and receive the following truths my heavenly Father just spoke to me..." and then I'd continue using the exact words that I'd heard and written down on the pad.

This is a biblical concept; one that you've probably heard taught often in church. It's "confess" or "confession", which is generally applied to sin but maybe you've never heard it applied to affirmation. The Greek word for "confess" is "homologeō" that means to speak the same thing, to assent, declare, or to agree with. In *An Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words*, one meaning is: "to declare openly by way of speaking out freely, such confession being the effect of deep conviction of facts". Sometimes rather than listening to and agreeing with the lies that fill our minds, we need to speak directly to our soul and confidently speak truth to it. The principle of speaking to our soul was used by David:

Ps 103:1-2 NAS

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, {bless} His holy name.

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits;

22 Bless the LORD, all you works of His, in all places of His dominion; bless the LORD, O my soul!

(See also Psa 42:5 & 11, 43:5, 104:35, 116:7, & 146:1).

Confessing out loud with authority is also a way we renew our mind, as Paul mentions in Rom 12:2; the mind being a part of our soul. It can be truly transformational when we begin not only to hear the affirming words that our heavenly Father speaks, but also declare them to our soul, spirit, and heart. As we begin to hear His words of affirmation, we need to be childlike by responding, "More, Abba Father, more" until our love tank is sufficiently filled.

Summary/Conclusion:

We began this lesson with the imagery of Psa 23 which portrays God as a shepherd that prepares a feast for his sheep. How does that truth relate to this lesson? Jesus sees himself in John 10 as the true Good Shepherd, the one who only did what He saw His Father doing, and in this case it was fixing a table filled with a feast prepared especially for only one sheep. The place he chose to serve the multiple course dinner was where the wolves and bears were watching, waiting to destroy the sheep. The parallel with Abba Father should now be easy to see. While all the demonic forces of darkness stand watching and waiting for an opportunity to destroy us, Abba Father has prepared a feast to honor each child. But

what is the food He chooses to provide for us today? That which will meet the deepest needs of our hearts and lives: an abundance of love where the first or main course is the meat and potatoes words of affirmation. And just think, there are five more courses yet to come! Sadly, too many are like me, who for years had the audacity to refuse to eat because it wasn't what I wanted. We need to repent by taking time consistently to listen for what Abba Father has to say, and once we begin to hear His words to say "More, Abba Father, more" as many times as necessary until our love tank is full. To properly digest the food we need to confess the words of affirmation to our soul until they begin to transform our lives. Abba Father's invitation is very clear, let us respond:

Isa 55:1-3a

1 "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

2 "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance.

3 "Incline your ear and come to me. Listen, that you may live...

In the Father's service,

Jim & Susan McCorkle

Repairing The Breach Ministry

www.rtbministry.org

Additional Resource:

The Blessing. By Gary Smalley

The Gift of the Blessing, by Gary Smalley and John Trent

Baseball player, Keith Hernandez's testimony <http://www.actsworld.org/articles/article.php?c=3&d=2&i=57>

Personal Application Questions

There are two ways in which this lesson should be looked at, therefore the questions are divided into two sections:

1. For you as a child:
 - a. Describe how your father affirmed you or failed to affirm you sufficiently.
 - b. Describe how your mother affirmed you or failed to affirm you sufficiently.
 - c. If you didn't receive the affirmation that you needed from your parents, have you tried to earn it through performance? Has performing ever truly satisfied the deepest needs of your heart?
 - d. Do you need to forgive each or both of your parents for the sin of neglect?
 - e. Will you decide today to start listening for the words of affirmation that your Abba Father longs to give to you? If so, when will you begin to do it? What do you plan to do with what you hear your heavenly Father say?
2. For you as a parent:
 - a. If you are a father, have you consistently taken each of your children by themselves out for his or her favorite dinner for the express purpose of sharing with that child words of affirmation?
 - b. If you are a mother, have you periodically fixed each of your children their favorite meal for the specific purpose of telling that child what you think and feel about them, and the special place he or she has in your heart?

Note: The best time to do this is not when the child deserves praise, but rather at a neutral time, or even better, after he has misbehaved. That way he won't be as likely to connect your words of affirmation to good performance. The earlier in the life of each child, even in the womb, that you begin doing this the better will be the affect.