



ELEMENTARY

Book 4 - Understanding the Father

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*A discipleship resource prepared by
Mount Gambier Baptist Church*

CONTENTS

About this series	6
Before you begin	7
Study 1: <i>Father, Creator, Redeemer</i>	9
Study 2: <i>Fatherhood & Sonship</i>	15
Study 3: <i>The Sonship of Israel, Jesus & Us</i>	21
Where to next?	27

ABOUT THIS SERIES

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others”

Paul in a letter to a young pastor (2 Timothy 2:2)

We are shown in the gospels that Jesus calls us to a deliberate journey of spiritual formation once we have become aware of his reign and accepted his Lordship over our lives. It calls for a sense of active belief in him, and a lifetime of following him in an intentional arrangement called *discipleship*.

The *Elementary* series has been developed to assist those who are taking their first steps into this discipleship journey. It will help you to explore some key things that Christians need to know somewhat early in their discipleship journey. It's our prayer that these studies help you to really grow in your faith and understanding of what it takes to be a follower of Jesus.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Here's a few quick tips to help you get started:

1. You'll need a Bible - either in print or in an app.
2. You'll need a *disciple-maker!* You could do this study on your own, but we believe in the greater value in going through this material with other experienced Christians who have worked through these ideas themselves. (In keeping with the Bible verse quoted above).
3. You'll need some dedicated time. There will be parts of these studies that need to be thought through, processed and even revisited. Take all the time you need, and don't overwhelm yourself by going too fast through them.
4. It's highly likely that you'll end up telling somebody else about what you've learnt, so we invite you to use the spaces provided to help you articulate things in your own words.

1

Father, Creator, Redeemer

The elementary series has enabled us to look at the Trinity and then in more detail about the person and work of God the Son, and the person and work of God the Holy Spirit. Yet, to this point, we have omitted further discussion about God the Father. Omitting a section on God the Father is not uncommon in theological overviews, nor general discussion about God. We talk of Jesus and the Holy Spirit directly, but when we talk about the Father, we often refer to him as 'God' and assume that we are talking about God the Father. But, it is vitally important that we come to know how God reveals himself as Father. Ultimately, all authority and all relationships emanate from God the Father (see the Apostles' Creed). Furthermore, it could be argued that the ultimate goal of our existence is to come to know God as Father (through the Son, by means of the Holy Spirit).

The next four studies focus on God the Father. The first focuses on the different ways that God reveals himself as Creator and Redeemer. In the subsequent studies we will spend time thinking about what it means for us to be in relationship with God the Father through participation in the Sonship of Jesus.

Idea 1: God the Father as Creator

We often start our prayers with 'Dear Father', or 'Dear Heavenly Father', and rightly so. Without discounting the importance of our relationship with all the persons of the Godhead, the Bible gives primacy to knowing God as Father. This isn't as obvious to us in the Old Testament as in the New Testament, where most epistles (letters) make mention in the opening greeting to God, our Father.

But, one way that God reveals himself in the Old Testament is as Father-creator. Read the passages below and explain what they say about God the Father as Creator.

Genesis 1:1-2:3

Job 38

Psalm 8:3-9

Psalm 33

Psalm 104

How is humanity described in relation to God and to Creation?

Idea 2: God the Father as Redeemer

Though we are made in the image of God creationally ("let us make man in our own image"), that is not the end of the story. Because of sin, we have essentially rejected our high position of sons of the Father. Yet, through the redemptive work of God, we are returned as sons of God. However, this is not merely a restoration. We are redeemed in Christ, not in Adam.

Read: Isaiah 2:1-5; 43:6-13; Ephesians 1:4-14; 3:6-7

It is incorrect to say that the Gentiles (non-Jews) were not included in God's plan throughout the Old Testament, but are in the New Testament. However, it is clear that the Israelites (Jews), not the Gentiles, were God's chosen instrument in the Old Testament. Their chosenness was for the sake of the redemption of all God's people.

What does Isaiah 2 reveal about God's plan for all humanity?

What is the significance of the mountain being the highest of the mountains?

What imagery is used (Isaiah 2:4) to show the outcome of the nations coming to the mountain of the Lord?

Ephesians 1:4-14 is a broad statement about our salvation. It begins "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." What will 'be put into effect with the times will have reached their fulfillment"?

What does Ephesians 3:6-7 say about the Israelites and Gentiles being redeemed?

Read Isaiah 43:6-13. Who is God addressing and how do we know he is revealing himself as Father?

How is this prophecy specific to Israel and why does it include other nations?

When speaking of God's redemption, we rightly speak of Jesus. But, the Father is active in redemption too. Create a brief statement of redemption, including reference to God the Father.

Your own reflections:

You are now invited to summarise what you've learned in the space below, in particular considering how you might explain these things to another person if they asked you.

2

Fatherhood & Sonship

Though the Old Testament alludes to the Trinity, it is not until the NT that the concepts of the Trinity and God the Father are filled out. As we will see, the relationship between Fatherhood and Sonship becomes really important in the story of God and his people. The genealogy of Jesus in Luke's gospel suggests that Adam is God's son and the New Testament tells us that we are God's offspring. As children of the Father, we have a relationship with him. Paul tells us in his letters that the Spirit of God in us makes us cry out to God, calling him, 'Abba', 'Father'. Some more modern translations suggest that 'Daddy' is a good translation for 'Abba'.

This, the second study on God the Father looks at our relationship with God as sons of God. It basically asks the question: "What does it mean to be sons of the Father?"

A: Fatherhood and Sonship

It can take time to understand the fatherhood of God because God can seem distant and separated from us. In fact the opposite is true.

Read: Psalm 8:3; Romans 8:14-17

How is 'Daddy' used by children and what implications does this have for our relationship with the Father?

Psalm 8:3 describes the high position of humanity. Knowing that we are God's offspring and sons of God puts us on the same level as Jesus the Son! How is this possible?

When do you know you are being led by the Spirit? Take it in turns to describe something in your life that has been Spirit led.

Romans 8:17 describes us as co-heirs with Christ. How do you see yourself in relation to this verse?

God works all things out in conformity with the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:11). This, along with the purpose of our adoption must be seen in light of the fact that God is love. Neglecting this fact would give us a skewed view of what our adoption means. We must always remember that in love, God purposes that we become *like His own Son*.

Read: Galatians 3:26-29; 4:4-6; John 1:1-5; 11-13; 14:6

Galatians speaks of being adopted by God as his children. What does the term 'adoption' mean and how does that relate to our relationship with the Father?

If you had to draw a picture to give an analogy of how our relationship with the Father is through the Son, what would that picture look like?

For what purpose are we adopted into sonship?

How is our adoption good news? In what way can you share that good news with people who are seeking faith?

About a decade ago, there was a deliberate movement away from understanding God as Father. Part of the reason for this was that some thought it was a barrier to conversion, due to the fact that some people have had bad experiences of Fatherhood. How does this study speak into such a discussion?

What evidence or scriptures could you use to demonstrate that God the Father is loving and pure and is unlike earthly fathers who cause pain or have been abusive?

What evidence or scriptures could you use to describe the healing that God brings into our lives so that we can relate to him as Heavenly Father?

Your own reflections:

You are now invited to summarise what you've learned in the space below, in particular considering how you might explain these things to another person if they asked you.

3

The Sonship of Israel, Jesus & Us

In Exodus, Israel is referred to as God's Son. Essentially Israel are his family. But they were a family that rejected him. In Romans we are told that "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel," meaning that although they were the chosen nation to bring God's name and nature to the world, it does not mean that they will be saved. This is not unexpected. Throughout the Old Testament there is a remnant theme, which suggest that there is a narrowing down of the nation of Israel to find the true Israel..

What we find in the New Testament is that this narrowing down leads us to Jesus. He is the true Israel, the true Son of God. He is the elect Son. Paradoxically, because there has been a narrowing down of the elect to one Man, Jesus, there is actually a great widening as a result. By trusting in Jesus and participating in his (true) Sonship, all the nations of the earth can be included in Jesus' Sonship, not just Israel. *We have been adopted as true Sons.*

If we share in Jesus' Sonship, then we can only understand our Sonship in relation to His. So, we need to think about what Jesus' Sonship is about.

The Sonship of Israel, Jesus and Us

Jesus demonstrated remarkable authority in all spheres of life on earth. Before we understand our own authority as sons of God we need to identify Jesus' use of authority.

**Read: Matthew 11:27; 28:18, Luke 20:9-19,
John 3:13; 17:2, 1 Corinthians 15:24**

What authority does Jesus have as the Son of God:

Over creation generally?

Over created people?

Over authorities on this earth?

Over spiritual powers?

Since Jesus' authority is also directly over us are there any of the above examples that relate to us as sons of God?

If we participate in Jesus' Sonship, we are Sons of God. The term 'Sons' is used here, as distinct from sons and daughters. This is very deliberate. Our sonship and relationship to the Father comes about only because of our participation in Jesus' Sonship. We are therefore, all Sons of God. If we refer to sons and daughters, we may understand the idea of being part of God's family, but we may miss the fact that we are only part of that family through our participation in Jesus' Sonship.

Read: Ephesians 1:15-23

What does our participation in Jesus' Sonship mean for our authority:

Over creation generally?

Over created people?

Over spiritual powers?

In our workplace?

Other?

How do you understand the Galatians (3:28) phrase, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you **are all one in Christ Jesus,**" with reference to a biblical understanding of Sonship?

The book and movie 'The Shack,' was quite controversial because God was depicted as an African American woman. Do you consider this an appropriate analogy to engage the modern world with the Gospel? Why/Why not?

Your own reflections:

You are now invited to summarise what you've learned in the space below, in particular considering how you might explain these things to another person if they asked you.

Now for some reflection on the whole topic of God as Father...

Take some time to look over all 5 summary notes pages in this study. When you are ready, take some time to write down a summary of the way you now understand God as your Father, and what changes in your relationship with Him as a result.

Where to from here?

This fourth short book has taken you into a important but often misunderstood aspect of Christian life. It is also worth noting that you have taken the time to study a pretty deep concept - if you've come to this page, you can view this as evidence that you are indeed growing in your development as a believer!

There's a couple of ways to move on at this time:

First, if anything in this study has triggered a need for some healing, then speak with your disciple-maker or close Christian friend or pastor about that - or even a counsellor. Although God is a perfect Father, there may be a chance that our own earthly experience may be different. It's worth having that real conversation.

Second, move on to Book 5 which examines some basics of Christian life - such as what role a church plays in it, and some productive things you can be doing now that you are becoming a little more grounded in your own faith.

The Elementary Series

Book 1:

Understanding Jesus

Book 2:

Understanding Salvation

Book 3:

Understanding the Holy Spirit

Book 4:

Understanding the Father

Book 5:

Understanding Christian Life & Community

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