

Meditate:

What does it mean that our Father is in heaven?
It means that there's no one bigger than our Dad – our Dad rules
He flung the stars into speckled space
He fashioned the blazing sun and deep lagoons of cloud and cluster
He created the planets, the constellations, and the galaxies
He conceived the Milky Way, the Helix Nebula, and the Pleiades
He made bubbles and arcs, nebulae and auras
He paints supernovas in effervescent colours
And stellar jets of iridescent glory
He out-thinks the physicist
And he dazzles the theologian
He preoccupies the astronomer
And inspires the poet with abundant wonder
He is beyond the reach of the Hubble telescope
Or the probing range of any Orbiter
He is what Einstein called "The Superior Reasoning Power"
And the Bible calls "The author of Heavenly Lights"
He is my Dad, and he is your Dad
Our Dad, who is in Heaven, the Third Heaven,
Who dwells in unapproachable light
And who will one day make his home with us, on this tiny dot that is Earth

Keeping the first line, write your own verse 2. Perhaps offering two lines each.

Respond:

In pairs, read Romans 8: 14-17 to each other. Pray for each other, that the love of the Father – both the affection and authority – would be the "breath on your face."

Joining a group and other resources:

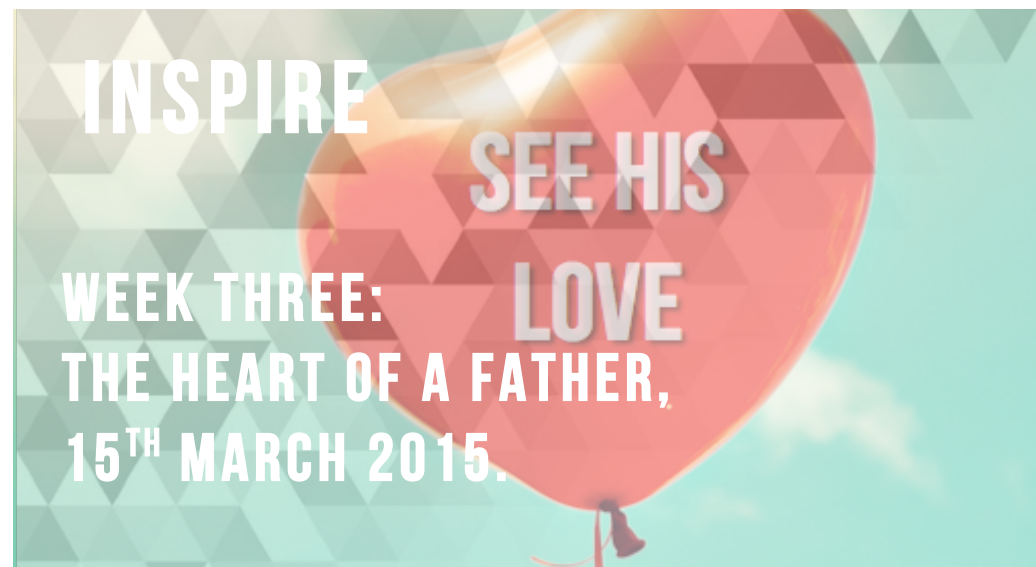
We encourage everyone to join a group if possible. We have daytime or evening groups and youth cells. If you would like to know more, please visit our website, or contact Guy on 01423 504160. There are many great resources to help you pray and enjoy the Scriptures on a daily basis.

www.pray-as-you-go.org A 12 minute guided prayer and meditation to listen to.

<https://www.wordlive.org> Many excellent daily reading approaches, available as an app.

<http://www.sacredspace.ie/> A short guided prayer and meditation to read.

Or download the app from Soul Survivor, with short daily videos: <http://bible.soulsurvivor.com/>



GROWING AT HOME

Three suggested discipleship activities suitable for all ages to help you grow, based on up - to God; in - to each other; out - to mission

Up Find a pebble, and the cross you have made. At the prayer gathering on 11th March we prayed for oppressors and persecutors, remembering God's character of love and mercy. We have all received God's mercy, and none of us is faultless enough to pick up the stone and claim the right to judge (John 8:7). The apostle Paul was a persecutor of the church before he met Jesus and his life was turned around. You can use this prayer as a starting point to pray for God to reveal his love to those who are causing persecution and oppression: Lord Jesus in your mercy, come. Soften my heart and unclench my fist from around this stone. Judgement is yours and I surrender it to you now. I recognise that your cross is higher and wider than I could ever imagine. I accept that your grace is so radical it offends the law of justice - so much that it welcomes me, a sinner into your very presence.

(Prayer copyright 2011 www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet)

In Talk together, and then write down some answers to prayer you have experienced, or heard about. Stand on what you have written, (stand on the pieces of paper!) and remember together that God is faithful, by reading: "Now to him to is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever, Amen!" (Ephesians 3: 20)

Out What does our Mission Partner of the month "Mission without Borders" do, and how are they helping people in Ukraine? Find out more and pray for them by visiting their website: www.mbuk.org

DAILY READINGS AND PRAYERS.

These daily readings are the same as the ones used in church every morning from 9 - 9.30. Feel free to join us, or use them at home. Read one or both of the readings asking yourself, "What is God saying to me, personally?" and, "How can I respond today?" If you are pressed for time there is a focus verse from the passages. Try reading the verse slowly, three or four times, allowing God to shape your heart and mind through His word. You can use these together with our daily prayer diary from the monthly newsheet.

Monday 16th March

Read: John 11: 38-44: **Question:** How can we live with the reality of dying? **Pray:** For someone you know who is grieving. Today a group go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land from St Mark's. Pray for an encounter with the Lord where he walked. **Act:** Place the small cloth or bandage by your cross. Thank Jesus that he has been through death for us.

Tuesday 17th March

Read: Mark 6:34-44: **Question:** Where can you be the solution to a problem? **Pray:** Lord, we bring to you the reality of hunger in this world. Help us to see where you call us to bring justice to those who are poor. Amen. **Act:** In Sierra Leone, three out of every four rural households do not have enough food to eat. Give 40p for every meal you have today, and 50p for every pudding.

Wednesday 18th March

Read: Matthew 26:6-13: **Question:** What did Jesus want them to understand by "You will always have the poor with you"? **Pray:** Get some perfume or sweet smelling oil. Place it on your hands and pray that you will be a blessing today. **Act:** Go and buy something outrageously generous for someone who isn't expecting it.

Thursday 19th March

Read: Micah 4:1-7: **Question:** What would the Kingdom of God look like in Harrogate? **Pray:** For an area of the world where there is war at the moment. **Act:** Watch the news, and pray for each situation you see.

Friday 20th March

Next Monday will be the second of our fasting days. Which mealtimes can you miss? **Read:** Luke 9:28-36: **Question:** Why do you think this was important for Jesus? **Pray:** Lord, we love to be in your presence. Help us to know you as you really are. And to know ourselves as you see us. Amen. **Act:** Climb a hill, or go to a beautiful place outdoors, and just enjoy it.

Saturday 21st March

Read: Matt. 21:1-9: **Question:** Hosanna means "Save us now!" What do you need saving from? **Pray:** that the Lord would make you whole. **Act:** Cut out the shape of a palm leaf and write a prayer of thanksgiving on it.

SEE HIS LOVE COURSE SESSION THREE: THE HEART OF A FATHER

First thoughts:

What was the main thing God said to you through the sermon?

Opening Prayer:

Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQi_IDV2bgM Pray in response.

Study:

While God is not called "Father" frequently in the Old Testament, these verses are important in revealing his heart: Exodus 4:22-23 ; Deuteronomy 1:31 ; 8:5 ; 14:1 ; Psalm 103:13 ; Jeremiah 3:22 ; 31:20 ; Hosea 11:1-4 ; Malachi 3:17. What does each verse reveal about God's heart for his people?

God is called "Abba Father" three times in the New Testament. Mark 14:36, Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6 Each time it expresses a cry from the heart – an aspect of the relationship we are to have with God. What is each of these occurrences revealing about the nature of our relationship to God?

Share:

How has your own upbringing helped your relationship with God? How has it hindered?

The secret of everything is this: Knowing you are the beloved of God. You are not what you do, have, or what other people think of you. You are God's beloved. No matter what. Last week Neil explored the idea that God will go to any lengths to pursue us. Jesus is the good Shepherd who goes after his sheep again, and again and again. God may well pursue us into hell, as long as it takes.

We might have slightly different understandings of what God's judgment is about. But the question that you need to begin with before any questions is: is your picture of God right? Do you trust him?

Put simply, people will sometimes ask me, "So and so died. I'm not sure if they are a Christian. Do you think they will be OK?" My response is not to try and give a lengthy sermon on doctrine of judgment and salvation. It comes down to some simple questions, "Do you trust God to do the right thing? Who is more loving – you or Him? Who knows this person better? Who loves this person more?..." If you want to explore the biblical material around hell, I've printed out some seminar notes.

How do we know how we are to talk to, think of, worship, this God of the Universe, this God who is Love? Jesus revealed him – as Father. Abba. Our Father. Of course we can't get our heads around the infinite God. But he has come to us. As Father. I'm convinced that if you only had the parable of the prodigal Son, you would have enough to know how to relate to God.

In 1989 a devastating earthquake flattened the country of Armenia, killing over 30,000 people in less than 4 minutes. In the midst of the confusion that followed, a father left his wife securely at home and rushed to his son's school, hoping for the best but fearing the worst. When he arrived, he discovered to his horror that his son's school had been flattened by the massive earthquake. While surveying the rubble, he remembered a promise that he had made to his little boy. "Whatever happens, I'll always be there for you." The situation looked hopeless, but he just couldn't take his mind off that promise. He remembered that his son's classroom had been in the back right corner of the building, so he rushed to that spot over there and started digging through the rubble. Other grieving parents arrived, crying for their children. Some tried to pull the man off the rubble saying, "It's too late! They're dead. You can't help." Even a police officer told the grieving father to go home. But courageously he proceeded alone because he needed to know for himself whether his boy was dead or alive and because of his promise. "No matter what, I'll always be there for you." He dug for 8 hours, then 12, then 24, then 36. Finally on the 38th hour he pulled back a large boulder and among the remaining rubble he heard his son's voice. He screamed, "Armand!" The little voice answered him, "Dad, Dad, it's me." Then the boy added these priceless words: "I told the other kids not to worry. I told them that you would

save us because you promised Dad. You promised me that that no matter what happened you'd always be there for me. You did it. You did it, Dad!"

For Jesus, everything began and ended with knowing God as His father. His favourite thing was to talk about his father. We are to have the same relationship with God as Father as Jesus had. The thing is, when we get on to dads, we can have some hang ups or misunderstandings which can skew the picture. We will come to those.

Jesus and the Father were one: Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? Do you believe that your heavenly Father wants to be one with you?

Jesus wanted the Father to work through him: The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Do you believe your Father wants to do the same through you?

Jesus wanted to be with the Father above all things: I am going to the Father. Do you believe your Father wants you?

Jesus introduced his followers to the truth that God is an intimate, loving, faithful daddy. The Lord's Prayer begins "Abba." It means "Daddy" It's the first word Jewish toddlers learn.

Did you know Jesus modeled for you that you can call God, "Daddy?" Christianity is the only religion to say the God who made you in love is your Abba.

If you find it hard to believe that you have the same intimate relationship with God your Father as Jesus had, listen to this:

"Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir."

But this is not just about affection. It's about authority. You are a child. You also inherit. Look at this famous photo. In it, John F Kennedy sits in the Oval office, while his child John Jr. plays securely. He sits securely under the authority and in the affection of his Abba. You could say you will not find a Father with more authority than your father in heaven. But, just as in this picture, Jesus wasn't worried about the Father's authority being destructive or manipulative or negative. When you are absolutely convinced of the Father's affection for you, you have no fear whatsoever of the Father's authority. Because you know He has your best interests in mind, you can be assured that His wisdom, His counsel, and His guidance can be trusted. You find

yourself wanting to cooperate and enthusiastically seek ways to bring your life under God's authority.

Do you trust that your Father loves you? We can know this theoretically, but there can be things which stop us knowing it in our experience.

One barrier is that we can misunderstand what happened on the cross. For some people in the back of their minds, while they love Jesus and can see his self sacrificial love for them on the cross, **behind him they see an angry father whose wrath needs to be placated.** One writer said that "The cross is the lightning rod of grace that short-circuits God's wrath to Christ so that only the light of His love remains for believers." ***But what about the God who is throwing the lightning?***

If I take a bullet for you that shows my love. But what about the one who is **firing** the bullet? What does that say about him? Can I know that he loves me? And if God needs to punish Jesus then has he really forgiven? Maybe **he has just taken out his anger** in another way. When you look at the cross how do you see the Father? Can you get close to the Father who punishes the Son? Can you trust him?

If we are to see the beauty of God the Father's love on Calvary, we need to remember some vital things. Firstly, that Jesus said, "**I and the Father are one.**" If you want to know what the father is like, he said, you look at me. It is not that God is **partly** like Jesus. There is not a Jesus part of God and then a Father part of God. God **is** Jesus. When Jesus died, God died. It's a mystery, but a crucial verse says this: "**God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself...**not counting people's sins against them." It's not that Jesus was standing in the gap between an angry father and a sinful you, deflecting the bullet. **It's that the father himself entered into Hell. Taking the consequences of his own justice** upon himself through His son.

His heart has always been towards us. We have always been hiding from him. We have had a distorted picture of God. But on the cross we see what Jesus and the father are like – **God's heart is a crucified heart.** God shows us how much He loves us. When you see this, you can start to trust Him.

God's big problem is not **how to deal with his anger and how to punish sin.** God's big problem is how to **restore the relationship** with us, which has been fractured and broken. If you look at the cross and see a cruel father there are two things you are not understanding. Firstly that **God himself is hanging there.** And secondly how **serious a problem our sin is.** God loves us so much that he hates sin and what it has done to us. The break in our relationship, in our covenant, is so deep, so profound, so important, that it can only be put right through life and death, blood and sacrifice. For people who don't get this, the cross is foolishness.

And of course, another problem can be that for many people knowing God as father is tough because we haven't known our fathers. Or when we have something has broken in us. Here is a picture of me with my dad. It's a picture that makes me sad, and happy. Happy because I know I was loved. Sad because I never knew him. Many people live with fatherlessness. Fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation, and is endemic. It's a huge issue in every country. If, in your heart, God as father is something that creates sadness, you have got to know this:

Throughout the Bible, God's character is that of a compassionate Father. 'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me...⁴ I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them. My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.

Is this your Father? It's how he wants you to know Him.

He delights in us and delights in giving us the Kingdom.

We don't have to beg, earn, impress, or cajole.

Our Father is not delighted in us because he must. It is just who he is.

Our Dad is the kind of Dad who...

comes running when one of His rebellious children returns home and there is no need to ask for forgiveness.

throws a party when one of His children accepts the Kingdom.

who sings and dances and claps His hands in delight over children.

who is extravagant in His love, lavishes His love and forgiveness on us.

who always has your best interest in mind and is on your side.

who was willing and is willing to go to any extreme, pay any price, to rescue any one of us.

Let's go back to that question Brennan Manning posed a couple of weeks ago. On Judgment Day, the Father will ask, "Did you trust that I loved you?"