

WHY STAY AN ORPHAN WHEN YOU'RE REALLY AN HEIR?

Before Jesus went to the cross, he told his bewildered disciples that they would receive 'another, just like me' – the Holy Spirit. *"I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you,"* he promised. He explained that the Spirit would ensure they did not feel alone or bereft or in need.

Later, Paul describes the fulfilment of this promise in his letter to the Romans. *Romans 8:13-17*

"You should behave... like God's very own children, adopted into his family – calling out to him, 'Abba, dear Father'. For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we will share his treasures – for everything God gives to his Son, Christ, is ours too. We are heirs together with Christ."

What a wonderful picture of how we belong to the Father. The Spirit speaks to us – not as just a thought in our head, but deep into our hearts, to the place of real 'knowing' – telling us we are assuredly a child of God. This 'knowing' is his wonderful gift to us, through the Spirit. It is certain, it is mind-boggling ("Me! God's child?") and it is full of joy. But there's more...

We are now able to call God "Abba." Abba is the way children address their dads in the Middle East, even today. It is a term of affection, of trust, of enjoyment, like saying Daddy, or Poppa. Every time Jesus spoke of 'the Father' ("Our Father in heaven...") he was saying Daddy. It was scandalous in his day!

Mark 1: 9-11 NLV

One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. And when Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens split open and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you – I delight in you."

John 14:16-18 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor or Advocate who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth. The world cannot receive him... But you know him, for he lives with you now and will later be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

He promises that because of the Spirit living in us - we will hear the words that he did – "You are my beloved child, and with you I am really delighted." Because everything the Son received, we too can receive.

Imagine holding a baby or a young child whom you love with great joy and saying, "I love you, I love you... You are so special to me!" And you feel that just because... because they are who they are – not because they have earned your love.

Jesus promises we will not be orphans, we will not be fearful slaves, we will not feel empty and poor and neglected - because we share with him in the treasures of his grace.

This is the "promise of the Father" – this is the wonderful work of the Spirit in our hearts.

And Jesus said to the disciples – wait until you receive this... and they did wait... and they did receive.

This is the **stunning promise** – we can know the Father's love. Our hearts can cry out to him Abba! Daddy, my daddy. Not orphans – but heirs.

We can have the confidence those first disciples had – that boldness of spirit – that ability to sacrifice anything for God – that grace to forgive even those who were putting them to death.

This is our birthright – our inheritance and God's children. A wonderful, wonderful, life-transforming promise.

But as well as a stunning promise – there is also

A sticky problem.

And we find it well illustrated in the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32

There is the Father – a loving, compassionate, generous man. He has two sons. The elder one is dutiful and hard working. The younger one is cheeky to the point of being insulting – and he demands his share of the inheritance and goes off and wastes all this money on wild living, ending up looking after pigs and being so hungry he wanted to eat their food.

Then a light went on for him – he realised that the workers on his father's farm were better off than he was. So he came home – and the tender, compassionate Father had been watching out for him, week after week, month after month, longing for him to return. And he sees him and runs towards him, losing his dignity in the process, and flings his arms around this thin and filthy young man and kisses him over and over and over.

And what these two sons say about this situation reveals the problem they have – and perhaps we have too. For neither of them feel at home in the Father's love. Neither of them truly believes they are loved and accepted as sons. Both of them speak as if they are orphans or slaves, not sons.

Listen to them. What does the younger son say?

Younger son: *Father, I have sinned against both you and heaven. I am no longer worthy of being called a son. Please take me on as a hired man.*

It sounds very noble and very humble. But it also shows he does not know his father.

What does the Father do? *"Get the best cloak, get a ring, get sandals for his feet, kill the fat calf – let's have a feast... my son is back. He was dead, but now he is alive, he was lost, but now he is found!"*

But I just want to be a servant. I feel too much shame... I have done it all wrong. I am not worthy. I can't celebrate – this is too embarrassing!

This is the heart of an orphan, an outcast, a lost son, who doesn't know he is found. How long did it take for his father's lavish love to change his heart – from being centred on himself - to being awed at the Father's merciful love? How long did it take him....? How long is it taking us?

Elder son: What was his response?

What is all this fuss? Why this extravagant party? What! That wasteful, dishonouring young man is back! He doesn't deserve a party! Look, I have slaved away for you all these years and not once had a party.

It sounds very just and very true. He has a right to be indignant. But he does not know the heart of his father either. He has worked for him for years – and has not realised how his father feels about him.

“Look, dear son, you and I are very close, and everything I have is yours.”

He doesn't realise he is an heir – he's a wealthy man. He could've had a party every week! He doesn't realise how much his father loves him and values him. And he is jealous, and judgemental, and angry.

Two men who behave like orphans, enslaved to false attitudes - instead of realising they were deeply loved and greatly valued sons. But then, are we any different?

I've been exploring signs of an orphan heart – a heart that has not heard and felt the deep love of the Father. There are many of them. They are uncomfortable to listen to, uncomfortable to read aloud.

But to find our way out of an orphan mentality – we need to face what is really there in our hearts – and then get them out, so there is room for the tender love of our Father to fill us instead.

Here's what I have discovered about the orphan heart.

- Lots of fears – fear of not enough, fear of loss, fear of being rejected, fear of being alone, being left out, of being abandoned. And these fears lock us up and rob us and hurt us.
- There is a sense of lack – we can't see all the blessings in our lives – we focus on what we don't have, like the elder brother. We can think we lack ability, we can feel we are not loveable, we feel we will never have enough so we accumulate and hoard, we must have more. 1 John 2:15-17 says that *“the love of Father is not in us”* if we are captivated by the cravings of the world. There is not room in our hearts for both. In fact, when the love of the Father soaks into our deepest heart we get quite detached from possessions, and status and compulsions and appetites. They lose their hold on us.
- There is a sense of powerlessness – I can't... It doesn't work like that for me... I can never... We can lose hope, easily feel panicky, lose a sense of purpose, lose our sense of self worth - we can feel despair, even depression. This traps us in self pity, and robs us of our rich potential in God and blocks us from receiving the resources of his grace.
- We can feel a lack of significance and so we overcompensate with trying hard to be helpful or trying hard to succeed or be good at things. Competitiveness or perfectionism can come from this. We want to be noticed, applauded, seen to be special... loved for what we do...because in our hearts we really feel we are nobodies.
- And out of our sense of fear and lack and powerlessness comes anger and irritation, put downs, pessimism, cynicism, unbelief. We take offense easily, we misinterpret things - our buttons are easily pushed. So we settle for shallowness and hiding our true selves. We

may joke a lot to cover up – or always make others the focus, so we do not have to really reveal ourselves.

- Often we can't trust authority figures, because we have been let down, or hurt or shut out in our early years. So we become spiritual loners. We can feel 'If I don't take care of myself, no-one else will.' It is hard for us to feel close to God or safe with others. We can find it hard to be rooted and settled. We can become unteachable, resistant to the truth that others are enjoying.
- Addictions and compulsions come from these feelings – they are all substitutes to make us feel better. Food, TV, soaps, novels, shopping, workaholism, alcohol... Sinful patterns in our lives seem impossible to break, because we really don't believe we can do it, or God can do it... and we don't deserve his help anyhow because we don't measure up.

This is a sticky problem... a sad problem - and most of us can see parts of ourselves in that list somewhere. But there is a way out.

But there is a simple path out of this.

There are 3 simple but profound steps out of these heart and mind habits of an orphan, that will take us into a place where we are free and filled by the love of our Abba, Daddy.

And the change can come gradually as we persist in new ways, or can come instantly in a time of seeking the Lord. Only the Spirit knows how these steps will happen for you.

But let us at least begin the process towards receiving the promise of the Father – the perfect love that casts out fear.

Here are the steps:

1. Renouncing all the false mindsets that we have bought into and lived by - saying "I refuse to believe them or live out of them".
2. Releasing – we choose to release all those who have neglected or wounded us and made us feel vulnerable to these false beliefs.
3. Receiving with joy the love of our Abba, our Daddy. Inviting his Spirit to fill us with his love.

I heard a man talk about two little boys he and his wife fostered. They were orphaned by their parents committing suicide one year apart. Bill said "At first, when they came to the table they grabbed everything in sight – and stuffed their faces and their pockets. In their hearts they did not know if there will be food tomorrow." They took some time to feel safe and provided for in the love of these new parents.

"We can have a panic about tomorrow and be like these orphans" – he said. "We need to be severed from the orphan spirit. We all have a cry in the heart for identity, belonging, and purpose.

Only the perfect Heavenly Father can give us these. Striving only exists in the absence of tasting the Father's love.

I got an email from a friend just this week. She and her husband have been missionaries and leaders of a mission organisation, and have had a heart of love for God for many years. But she said this:

For two weeks in May we were especially privileged to be a part of our International Leaders Conference in Thailand. What an incredible time!!! Two hundred people gathered from all over the world, many arriving tired, lonely and in need of God's renewal. God heard our prayers and the longings of our hearts. We worshipped, cried, prayed for each other, and for the world, and heard God's word spoken as if into our very souls. It was a time of revival for us all. For me Andrea, God expressed his love in a beautiful way. The message translation of John 15:9 says, "*make yourself at home in my love*". I realised that I had found it hard to receive and know God's love in the hard times and when feeling overwhelmed. I had become a polite visitor, not away from his love but not really at home there. In a gentle and profound way He helped me to **feel at home in his love again**.

What happens when we take that simple path, and the Father's love frees and fills our hearts?

This is what I have heard people say:

"It felt like... finally I had come home."

"At last I feel safe and secure."

"I feel clean and new and free at last. I never knew I could feel like this."

"I'm not afraid any more... it has just gone."

"I know that I know that I know that I am loved. I've never felt like this before."

"I know I am OK as I am. I've stopped putting myself down."

"I keep crying – I can't help it! My heart feels so tender towards him and others."

"I just want to love him and enjoy him all the time."

"Peaceful – at rest – confident in his love."

Couldn't we all do with more of this? It would help you to pray these prayers – perhaps more than once – until you receive a new assurance of the love of the Father in your heart.

A prayer of renouncing

Father God, in Jesus' name I renounce every attitude and behaviour of my orphan heart; my fears and my compulsions, my wrong beliefs about lack and powerlessness and the need to hide.

I renounce my distrust of authority figures, and I turn from the substitutes I have looked to in place of your love.

I ask you Holy Spirit to cleanse my heart from everything that stops me knowing the perfect love of my Father.

Please keep revealing what I need to turn from so I can be fully free.

A prayer of releasing

In Jesus' name I release from debt all those who have hurt me or withheld love from me in any way – all those who have wounded me in the past with their words or attitudes.

I release them from my debt. They no longer owe me anything.

(Name them)

“.....I forgive and release you now in Jesus' name. You are no longer in debt to me. I tear up the IOUs. And I ask the favour and blessing of the Lord to be upon you.”

A prayer of receiving

Thank you Father that the blood of Jesus makes me clean from all my offenses.

I now open my heart to receive your love, through the Holy Spirit which you promise to pour out upon me.

Come Spirit of love, wash and fill my heart, so I know the perfect love of my Abba, my Heavenly Daddy.

I receive now through the Holy Spirit the spirit of adoption so I can now cry 'Abba, my Daddy!'

I know I am not alone. I am deeply loved.

I am completely accepted and cherished. I am worth dying for.

I am the apple of my father's eye. He dances with joy over me.

Nothing can separate me from His love. I am one with Him.

He will never, ever leave me or forsake me.

I trust in His love. His perfect love casts out all my fears.

I am an heir of all the riches of grace. Abba! Father!

Abba! My Daddy. Fill my life with your love and your wisdom.

Nourish and strengthen me in your love.

I love you, Abba! I am yours forever.

Here is a fresh way to read Psalm 23.

The Lord is my Abba, Daddy, Therefore I am never in need.

He insists I rest in green meadows and he shows me the way to peaceful, refreshing streams. He always takes my hand and guides me along the right paths, bringing honour to his name. Even when I have to walk in the dark valley of death, my Abba Daddy is close beside me, so I am not afraid.

When my enemies surround me he puts on a feast for me!

And he welcomes me as a special guest, anointing my head with oil and many kisses!

My life overflows with his generous blessings.

I know absolutely that my Abba's goodness and constant love will pursue me all the days of my life, and one day I will live in his house forever.