



LOVE FIRST

Small Group Discussion Guide



PREPARATION

❑ **STUDY**

Spend the week studying Romans 8:12–17 and Ephesians 1:3–14. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

❑ **DETERMINE**

Determine which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group.

❑ **PRAY**

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

❑ **LANDING POINT**

As a child of God, I have direct access to my Father, who gives me identity, love, pleasure and place.



GROUP DISCUSSION

❑ **CONFIDENTIALITY** | What's said in the group stays in the group.

❑ **NO CROSS-TALK** | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

❑ **NO FIXING** | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

❑ **SHARING** | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

A POWERFUL IMAGE

People see God in different ways. Some see Him as far off and disengaged from what's going on in our lives. Many people think of Him as an angry God who's out to punish us. Some even call Him a cruel tyrant who's anything but loving.

The Bible portrays God differently. Sometimes He is portrayed as the good and sovereign King. He's just and righteous. Other times He is seen as the husband who loves His bride with an unending love, even when she is unfaithful to Him. He's patient and merciful.

This week your group will look at an image of God found in both the Old and New Testaments—the image of God as Father. And we are His adopted children.

Adoption is one of the most important doctrines of the faith because it's the doctrine that makes intimacy with God possible. If you have put your trust in Christ, you have been adopted into God's family. That means you now have direct access to God your Father, who gives you identity, love, pleasure and place.¹

Q: *Describe how you've seen God portrayed in our culture.*

Q: *How is the image of God as Father different from images of Him as King or husband?*



Select 2–3 questions to discuss as a group.

AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

One of the most beloved chapters in all the Bible is Romans 8. When we read it, we are treading on the mountaintops. It's infused with hope about all that Jesus has accomplished for us. Because He took our place on the cross, we can be righteous (literally, “in the right”) before God. We are justified. God no longer sees our sinfulness. Instead, He sees Christ's sinlessness. This means that believers are no longer under condemnation (Romans 8:1). They are set free. This is a glorious thing!

But God doesn't stop at justification. He goes a step further and makes us His children.

As a child of God, believers are adopted into His family. Adoption makes an intimate relationship with God possible. God's Spirit indwells believers, giving them life and leading them. Believers are no longer slaves to sin, forced to live their lives in fear. They have been given a new identity as a son or daughter of God. This new identity changes everything. Through Christ, believers receive the Father's love instead of His wrath. He is a Father who takes pleasure in His children. In the Father's eyes, believers are accepted rather than rejected. And they receive a special place of honor as a member of God's family. In Christ, believers have a promised inheritance.

READ: *Romans 8:12–17. How does adoption make an intimate relationship with God possible?*

Q: *How would you describe your identity in Christ in your own words?*

BLESSED BEYOND MEASURE

Another hallmark passage in the Bible is Ephesians 1, where Paul sings praises to God the Father. Before God spoke the world into existence, He knew who He would adopt into His family. This was His plan—to redeem a people for Himself through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus. This is where history is going. It's moving toward God the Father being forever united with His children.

Paul tells the Ephesians, “This is lavish grace, friends. This is God in all His wisdom, making wonderful and mysterious things known to us. You are a child of God, and that means you are in the family now. You have been

sealed with God's Spirit as a guarantee of the inheritance you will receive. Oh, see how the Father loves us! He is so generous and has given you every spiritual blessing imaginable. He's a Father that doesn't hold back. He opened the floodgates so that you might enjoy your relationship with Him to the full."

🗣️: *Split into pairs and read Ephesians 1:3-14 to one another. You can even read it as if Paul was speaking directly to the person by name.*

🗣️: *Where would you like to experience more of God's spiritual blessings in your life?*



LIVE

Select 2–3 questions from this section to answer.

FATHER GIFTS

In his book *Father God: Daring to Draw Near*, Dave Patty tells us that God the Father gives His children four main gifts: identity, love, pleasure and place. Each of those gifts gives you something significant. Identity gives you value. Love gives you security. Pleasure gives you motivation. Place gives you honor. Receiving these gifts is exactly what you need to experience the abundant life Jesus promised (John 10:10) and satisfy the hunger of your heart.²

Each of us hungers for a father to love us in a way that makes us feel valued and accepted. We want a relationship in which we feel safe and welcomed. Sadly, for many, the word 'father' brings to mind times when they were rejected, hurt or unloved.

The good news is that God is a Father like no other. His love and commitment are never ending. Even when you fail, His love and mercy are available to you. The Father's four gifts of identity, love, pleasure and place are life-changing. They give you the confidence and purpose to experience God's best for you.

Q: Describe your relationship with your father. What was good? What was lacking?

Q: How would your life be different if you received all four of the Father's gifts in your life?

YOU HAVE ACCESS

Your passport identifies you as a citizen of a particular country. When you cross the border into another country, you're asked to reveal your passport to prove your identity. As a child of God, you have access to God the Father through His Son and the Spirit. They are your passport to the Father. You belong to Him. Jesus opened the way for you to get back to God. His death and resurrection freed you from being a slave to sin and made you a son or daughter of God. The Spirit works in you so that you can enjoy all the benefits of being a child of God. He opens your eyes to see that living in relationship with God is more satisfying and life-giving than any other relationship or pursuit.

Q: What can hold you back from going to the Father with your needs, desires, hurts, etc.?

Q: Name one thing you can do this week to remember your identity as a child of God.



LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

SHARING THE FATHER'S HEART

God wants others to experience His heart of love. One way you can share His love is by engaging in orphan care. God is a Father to the fatherless (Psalm 68:5) and commands special protection for them (Exodus 22:22). God's people are called to rise up and defend the weak and fatherless (Psalm 82:3). James even says that caring for orphans is one aspect of true faith in God (James 1:27).

There are 200 million children without a mother or father worldwide. In the United States, nearly 500,000 children

are currently in foster care.³ Maybe God is calling you to pursue foster care or adoption. Perhaps He's calling you to get involved through financial giving or volunteering in orphan care. Whatever it is, seize the opportunity to spread a love for your Good Father's name to others.

🕒: *Recall a time when you experienced the heart of God in someone else. What did that teach you?*

🕒: *What's one way you will spread a love for the Father's name this week?*



PRAY

Praise God as the Good Father. Pray for the fatherless in your community and abroad and ask God to reveal ways that you can share His heart with others through orphan care.



FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read 1 John 3:1–2 and reflect on how God expresses His love to us.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their lives.



BLESSED ASSURANCE “The witness of the Spirit gives the Christian’s spirit assurance that he or she is God’s child. [...] All who are God’s children are also heirs of His promises, but a willingness to follow Christ in suffering is another sign of being God’s children.”⁴

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND When Paul speaks of our adoption, he “refers to the Greco-Roman practice of adoption, which guaranteed to adopted children all the rights and privileges of natural children (Rom. 8:23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph. 1:5).”⁵

GOD’S PLAN “By pre-destination in his various uses, Paul asserts that God determined ahead of time certain states of affairs: that He conform believers to Christ’s image (Rom. 8:29–30), that wisdom achieve the glory of His people (1 Cor. 2:7), and that we be for the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:11–12).”⁶

ENDNOTES:

1. Dave Patty, *Father God: Daring to Draw Near* (78 Press, 2016), 32.
2. *Ibid.*, 25–33.
3. “Caring for Orphans at Home and Abroad: Matching Grant Opportunity,” *Hope for Orphans*, June 12, 2017, <https://hopefororphans.org/adoption/2017/matching-grant/>.
4. Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2170–2171.
5. Douglas J. Moo, “The Letters and Revelation,” in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 2306.
6. William W. Klein, “Ephesians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians–Philemon (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 49.