

SESSION TWO:  
DO YOU BELIEVE AND TRUST  
IN GOD THE FATHER?

pilgrim

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In this session we are looking at what Christians believe about God. We start with a story from the Old Testament, the record of God's dealings with the world before Jesus, where God is revealed as one who cares and loves – like a Father.

# Opening Prayer

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Lord, lead me on the way of faith  
**Help me to follow Christ.**

Open my heart to receive your love  
**Open my mind to understand your word.**

When I was really going through it, I prayed to the Lord.  
He answered my prayer, and set me free.

The Lord is on my side,  
I am not afraid of what others can do to me.

With the Lord on my side  
I will defeat all my enemies.

It is best to trust the Lord for protection.  
Don't put your trust in anyone else.

FROM PSALM 118

Now that we have been put right with God through faith,  
**We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

He has brought us by faith into the grace of God

**We rejoice in the hope of sharing God's glory.**

This hope does not deceive us:

**God has poured his love into our hearts  
by the gift of his Spirit.**

BASED ON ROMANS 5.1-2

Generous God, loving Father, in Jesus you are one with us so that we may be one with you. Help me walk this way of faith and following the path of Christ. **Amen.**

## Conversation

**What are the qualities you look for in a great parent? Share some of your best experiences of being a parent or of being a child.**

## Reflecting On Scripture

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### Reading

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. <sup>2</sup> The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. <sup>3</sup> Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. <sup>4</sup> I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.

HOSEA 11:1-4

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### Explanatory Notes

*Egypt* was where the people of God were slaves before Moses led them out across the Red Sea.

*The Baals* refers to the images worshipped by the Canaanites (the people who lived in the promised land before the people of God). They were images of Baal, the Canaanite God of thunder and fertility.

- Read the passage through once
- Keep a few moments silence
- Read the passage a second time with different voices
- Invite everyone to say aloud a word or phrase which strikes them
- Read the passage a third time
- Share together what this word or phrase might mean and what questions it raises

**'I taught them to walk'**

When you think about God what kind of pictures come to mind? An old man with a white beard? A king sitting on a throne? Someone distant and far away?

The Bible uses many different images to talk about God but one of the most common is that of God as a father. Hosea 11.1-4 is a particularly evocative image of God as a parent teaching a wobbly toddler to walk and then catching them in his arms and holding them next to his cheek. It is a beautiful image full of tenderness and love. Unlike other ancient religions from this part of the world, God is not always described as a distant, all powerful God. He is also portrayed as a loving, caring God who cherishes and nurtures his people.

*"God is not a distant tyrant figure"*

When we get into the New Testament, this image of God as our loving father has developed even further. In the Old Testament, God is described as 'like' a father; not just a

distant, powerful king but in the New Testament Jesus encourages us not just to think of God as like a Father but to address him as Father (as in the Lord's Prayer: 'Our Father...'). Jesus intends us to relate to God, just like he does to a loving Father who cares for us so much he is ready at any moment to sweep us into his arms and hold us against his cheek.

This changes our relationship with God almost entirely. It reminds us that God is not a distant tyrant figure ready to swoop down and punish us whenever we put a foot wrong; but a loving, tender father who aches with love for us as we try to walk with wobbly, hesitant footsteps.

The problem, of course, is that the word Father is not a positive one for everyone. We use human imagery of God to help us to understand a bit more about who he is and how we relate to him but, frankly, sometimes this human imagery gets in the way. If we struggle with our human families, then the thought of a divine family will hardly inspire us. What is important is that you allow yourself to recognize that you are loved with a love that transcends any human experience you might ever have had. What is important is the love not the words we use to describe it.

## IN SHORT

Although we have strong images of God as an old man sitting on the throne, a very important image of God in the Bible is that of God as a loving, caring and nurturing Father. Whatever our experiences of our own fathers, this reminds us that God loves us with a love stronger than any other we will ever know.

**For discussion**

- Can you remember a time when you felt deeply loved? What did it feel like?
- When you hear God described as being a Father what kind of images come to mind?
- Is there anything about this image that you find difficult?

**An angry God?**

One of the things that most puts people off God is the description of his anger. This is most obvious in the Old Testament but you do find it in the New Testament as well. If God is really a loving God, how can he be so angry?

The answer seems to be found in that love. The angry God we meet particularly in the prophets is angry *because* he loves his people so much. The book of Hosea is a particularly interesting example of this. The story of God's anger is told through the lens of the prophet Hosea who is deeply and profoundly let down by a woman he loves. Hosea tells us that God feels just like this. He loves his people and is let down again and again by them. As a result he is angry but expresses that anger in the hope that they will return to him and love him again. Anyone who has found themselves in that position (and we all are from time to time) must surely sympathize with God's loving anger towards his people.

There is no easy way round the difficult language of God's anger in the Old Testament. It makes us feel uncomfortable and it should. But it stands as a powerful reminder of God's love for us, a love that knows no end.

IN SHORT

People are often put off by descriptions of God's anger in the Bible. If you read carefully, however, you realise that this anger exists because of the depth of God's love for us. Love and anger go hand in hand: the more you love someone the more you care when they let you down. God's anger is a sign of his love.

### For discussion

- Can you think of times when you have been angry because you loved someone so much?
- How did that anger express itself? And how did it become an expression of love?

## Concluding Prayers

Almighty God,  
your son has opened for us  
a new and living way into your presence.  
Give us new hearts and constant wills  
that we may learn of your love  
and come to worship you in spirit and in truth;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## Sending Out

During this next week reflect on what you have learned and explored in this session. Think about Jesus and how and why you are attracted to him, and though him to God. What else could you be doing this week to get to know Jesus better?

These readings may help you in your reflections –

When the picture of someone has been painted on wood, but then damaged by the elements, we need the presence of that person whose portrait it was if we are to restore their image. And if this material is not discarded, it is because we value and wish to restore the image painted on it. In the same way, the most holy Son of the Father, being the image of the Father, has come into our midst to renew us who have been made similar to him. He seeks us out when we are lost, pardoning our sins, as Scripture says: 'I have come to search out and save that which was lost.'

ATHANASIUS (295–373)

Let your door stand open to receive Christ, unlock your soul to him, offer him a welcome in your mind, and then you will see the riches of simplicity, the treasures of peace, and the joy of grace. Throw wide the gate of your heart, stand before the sun of the everlasting light that shines on everyone. This true light shines on all, but if any close their windows they will deprive themselves of eternal light. If you shut the door of your mind, you shut out Christ. Though he can enter, he does not want to force his way in rudely, or compel us to admit him against our will.

AMBROSE (c.334–97)

Lord, let me seek you in desiring you  
and desire you in seeking you.  
Let me find you by loving you,  
and love you in finding you.

ANSELM (1033–1109)