

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with the fact that God is our Father. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Our Father which art in heaven" (Matt. 6:9), He unleashed a theological bombshell. The Jews did not think of God as their father. They envisioned God as far away on top of Mt. Sinai and only special men like Moses were permitted to talk to Him. Barriers were even placed around Mt. Sinai and any man or beast that went beyond those barriers was stoned or shot through with arrows (Ex. 19:12-13).

The Hebrew word for father "ab." It occurs 1195 times in the O. T. Scriptures. Only 15 times is it used in a religious sense and none referred to God as our personal Father. In those few passages which refer to God as a Father, He is only considered as the Father of the nation (as in Deuteronomy 32:6), or of the Father of the King of Israel (as in I Chronicles 17:13). In O.T. times God was not considered the Father of any individual, or even of mankind as a whole.

The Greek word for father is "pater." It is found in the New Testament Scriptures 402 times and 245 of these are used in a religious sense. Jesus not only considered God as His Father, but wanted us to do the same. That's why He taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father which art in Heaven. . . ." Realizing how difficult it would be for Jewish people to think of God as their Father, Jesus encouraged them to remember their earthly fathers. We come to our earthly fathers in a fearless manner and ask them for anything our hearts desire. We can ask for anything with the absolute assurance that our earthly fathers would never harm us. Our earthly fathers would never give us anything that would be detrimental to our welfare (Lk. 11:11-13). Now we can come with that same boldness into the very presence of God (Heb. 10:19).

Jesus reminded everyone that if we, being evil, know how to give good things unto our children, how much more shall our Father which is in heaven give good things unto them that ask Him (Matt. 7:11). But Jesus went one step further. He not only referred to God as His personal Father, but spoke of Him as "Abba" (Mark 14:36). "Abba" is roughly equivalent to our English word "daddy."

In the entire wealth of Hebrew Scriptures, and the ancient devotional literature of the Jews, only one reference to our Heavenly Father as "Abba" has been found. This single reference is in the literature of Rabbinical Judaism in the Babylonian Talmud. It is dated about the first century B. C. It did not come from scholars, but from innocent school children praying "Dear father (Abba) give us rain." Jesus, as you know, said that to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven we need to be converted and become like little children (Matt. 18:1-6).

Jesus, however, took "Abba" even further. He not only prayed to God Himself as "Abba" but taught us to do the same. As a matter of fact this is a specific part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Our transition from the life of a slave to the life of a son is so dramatic that we cannot accomplish it successfully on our own. It is therefore the work of the Holy Spirit to give testimony to the fact that we are children of God, not slaves, and to cry out on our behalf "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

The same revolutionary message is found in Galatians 4:6: **“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts crying Abba, Father.”** We would never dare to do such a thing on our own, but the Holy Spirit leaves us with no alternative. Not only does the Holy Spirit impel us to think of God as our personal Father (A Father who incidentally watches over us so carefully that even the very hairs of our head are all numbered) The Holy Spirit also emboldens us to communicate with God in the most endearing and intimate terms. We are encouraged to talk to God with the very kind of language a trusting child uses when they fling their loving little arms around their daddy’s neck.

Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus! We shall be eternally grateful that you have broken down the barriers that separated us from God and have sent your Spirit into our hearts that we might cry out, “Abba Father.”

Not everyone is given the privilege of being a father. Abraham, for example, had wanted to be a father for many years without having a child. With the help of God, however, he not only became a father but his descendants became a numerous as the stars of the heavens (Gen. 15:1-6).

Remember! **“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain” (Ps. 127:1).** There is a spiritual dimension to the family. Our children are a gift to us from God and God expects us to train our children in the way they should go (Prov. 22:6).

If God ever blesses you with the privilege of being a father, please step up to the plate and be the kind of father that God wants you to be!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce