

A REAL RELATIONSHIP

For more information on the material in this session,
read chapter 5 of the book *Forgotten God*.

What comes to mind when you think about relationships? Do you think of having long conversations? Spending time with someone? Going out of your way to make someone happy? Maybe your mind goes straight to a specific person and how much he or she means to you.

Or perhaps your view of relationships isn't so warm and cozy. Maybe every time you've opened your heart and life to someone you've been disappointed and burned. If that's the case, the thought of relationships might be associated with insecurity.

When it comes to a relationship with God, there is nothing worse than insecurity and nothing better than enjoying an ongoing intimacy and confidence in your relationship.

1. Before you go any further, honestly describe your relationship with God. Be descriptive—how does your relationship feel, how do you maintain it, and so on?

Most believers understand that Christianity is about a relationship with God. But we don't always recognize the Spirit's critical role in that relationship.

Read Galatians 4:1–7.

In the book of Galatians, Paul teaches about the role of the Law for the Jewish people in the Old Testament. He says that the Law was given to watch over and guide the nation of Israel until Jesus Christ, the Messiah, came to set them free. In order to explain this, Paul contrasts two types of people: slaves and sons.

2. Think about this imagery. What is the difference between a slave and a son?

List some differences between the two. (For example, what treatment does each receive? What privileges does each have? How does each feel? What confidence does each have?)

Slaves	Sons

The incredible truth is that in Christ we have been adopted by God. Whether or not we feel like children of God, this is reality. But God wasn't satisfied with simply adopting us; He wanted to be sure that we would *feel* like children of God. Paul says that God gave us the Holy Spirit for that very reason: "Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal. 4:6).

That term "Abba" was the most endearing way to address a father. The modern equivalent would be the word "Daddy." Let the significance of this hit you. It's incredible enough that we can call almighty God our Father. But then He sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts and prompts us to cry out to Him, "Daddy!"

3. What is the significance of Paul's statement here? How should it affect your relationship with God to know that He sent the Holy Spirit into your heart to cry out "Abba!"?

Read Romans 8:12–17. In this passage, Paul makes basically the same statement. We have it confirmed once again—the Holy Spirit lives within us in order to convince us that we are God's children: "You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15–16).

In this case, Paul adds the thought that we should not fall back into fear as though we were slaves. Because we are not yet perfected, we all sin on a regular basis. For many of us, falling into sin can cause us insecurity in our relationship with God. We begin to feel unworthy and afraid. Our response is just like that of the Prodigal Son. In shame, he crawled back to the father, believing that he could not be accepted as a son, but hoping that he might be able to serve as a slave. Imagine his shock and overwhelming joy when the father came running to embrace him as a son!

4. Most of us experience situations where our guilt or perfectionism keeps us from enjoying intimacy with God. In times like these, how should the truth of Romans 8:15–17 restore our intimacy with God?

How do you feel about the truth?



If you have the *Forgotten God DVD Study Resource*, watch the video for session 5, particularly if you are meeting with a group. After the video, come back and work through the rest of this section.

Though we don't always realize it, intimacy with God is the deepest desire of the human heart. Not only that, but God also strongly desires a relationship with us—so much so that He sent His Spirit into our hearts so that we could have constant fellowship with Him.

To some extent, we all know what it's like to feel close to another person, whether it be a mom or dad, a husband or wife, a child, a sibling, or just a good friend. Whatever it is, there's nothing like sharing a close personal relationship.

5. Most of us tend to take our relationships for granted, but what is it that makes close personal relationships so incredible?

No matter how close you may feel with another human being, the potential for intimacy with the Holy Spirit is always greater. Close friends may stick by your side no matter what, but the Holy Spirit actually lives inside of you! Think about it, every second of every day the Spirit of the living God is within you—"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?" (Ps. 139:7).

At this point, most of us start to wonder, "If this is true, why don't I feel close to Him?" I think that most of us become distanced from the Spirit for two primary reasons: comfort and noise.

In John 14, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the "Helper" or "Comforter" (KJV). Though it is a reassuring thought to have a Helper and Comforter on hand, many of us have made our lives so comfortable and "safe" that we don't need to be comforted. Usually, it's not until an unexpected tragedy strikes that we feel uncomfortable.

6. Have you ever found yourself in a place where you absolutely needed the Spirit to help or comfort you? If so, what was it like and how did the Spirit comfort you?

7. If you answered no to that question (or if you had to think about it awhile), do you think you should consider living a more radical life where you need the Spirit to come through? Why, or why not?

If your life isn't too comfortable, it's probably too noisy. One of the most observed and bemoaned aspects of life in the twenty-first century is the rapid pace of everything. When we're not busy at work, we're on the phone or talking to friends and family. Even inanimate objects demand our attention—televisions, iPods, radios, newspapers, computers, books (like this one), and so on.

8. When was the last time you sat quietly with nothing at all to distract you?
What was that like?

You may need to do something about this right now. Your life may have become so busy and so noisy that you haven't sat alone with God for weeks—maybe even years. Maybe taking the time to go through this workbook is yet another distraction that is keeping you from intimacy with God. If that's the case, set it aside and spend some time speaking and listening to God directly. You absolutely won't regret it.

9. List some of the things that distract you from a real relationship with God.

10. Which of those things do you need to get rid of or back off on in order to pursue intimacy with God? How can you do this?

I hope this section doesn't come across as harsh or accusing. You may have an incredible relationship with God. Maybe He's more real to you than the people around you. If that's true, then praise God! That's the goal we're all headed toward. My purpose in writing this is to help you maintain that relationship through the power of the Spirit and to remove some of the things that inhibit intimacy with God.

The most important reason to pursue a relationship with the Spirit of God is that Jesus gave His life so that you could pursue one. As Paul explained, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us ... so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:13–14).

At times, you may be tempted to feel that the Spirit is keeping Himself distant from you or that you're trying to find God, but He doesn't want to be found. When that thought enters your mind, remember the truth of Galatians 3:14. Jesus died so that you could receive the Spirit. He purchased that intimacy for you at the greatest possible price.

11. Are you guilty of taking the Holy Spirit for granted? If so, how can you begin to reverse that trend in your life?

Remember that it is the Holy Spirit who cries out, "Abba! Father!" in your heart. He is the one who bears witness with your spirit that you are a child of God. God has adopted you into His family. May you be empowered by the Holy Spirit to approach Him as your Daddy. May you stand secure in your relationship with Him, and may that overflow into the intimacy that comes through obediently walking in the Spirit.

12. Spend some time in prayer. Ask God to draw you closer to Himself. Pray that His Holy Spirit would increase your intimacy as a child of the living God.

REFLECTIONS ON ...

A Real Relationship

SESSION 6