



## Amazed at Christ's Love— He Calls Me His Child!

### *A Time to Reflect*

#### **The Value of Family**

- *Recall what you longed for most in a father when you were younger.*
- *List the top three things you think children need most from a father.*
- *How do you picture your heavenly Father? What do you long for from him?*

God created us for relationships. Relationships are gifts from him, and none greater or more amazing than the relationship with our heavenly Father. Our understanding of our relationship with our heavenly Father is the key to properly approaching and appreciating all our relationships.

### *A Time to Review*

#### **God Lavishes Love on Us**

Understanding how God views us and the special identity he has given us affects all our relationships.

**1 John 3:1** *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*

- *Describe what first comes to your mind when you think of the word "lavish."*
- *Illustrate what "lavish" looks like when used to describe a father's love.*

- Explain why it is so hard at times to accept that we are children of the heavenly Father lavished with love.

John states it as a fact: we are children of God only because of his lavish love! Notice the emphasis. This relationship is a gift of God, not one we earned or deserved. The world may not recognize or respect our identity because it really doesn't know God. To "know God" is the key to understanding what it means to be called his children. What we learn about God and his relationship with us will have a major impact on our identity and how we see ourselves. Our Father in heaven isn't some distant God leaving us guessing. He clearly "showed his love among us" (1 John 4:8-10). Look at how Paul explains it with descriptions we can grab on to. Circle phrases in the passages below that paint a clearer picture of the extent of Christ's love for us. Then underline the blessings we gain because of it.

**Romans 5:6-10** <sup>6</sup>You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly . . . <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup>Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! <sup>10</sup>For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

**Galatians 4:4-7** <sup>4</sup>But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. <sup>6</sup>Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

- Explain how each of the circled phrases shows the extent of his lavish love.
- Describe what the great blessings you underlined mean for your life.
- How does "time" fit into the way God shows his love toward us?

Although he also has many other characteristics, God is Love. It is who he is. It is the very nature of God. It is seen in what he does. He isn't one who loves us "if" or "when" we meet some conditions. His love is . . .

**Unconditional love** – An attitude with action based on the character of the person doing the loving (not based on the character or behavior of the person being loved). It is a choice that looks for opportunities to benefit another even if they don't seem deserving of it.

**Agape** (love) – The Greek word used to describe such an unselfish love, poised and ready to serve, a love defined by Christ's life, who put his life on the line for us.

Read Psalm 103 and list some of the "benefits" God gives us. Then thank and praise him for them.

We also refer to this as “GRACE” (charis) – a gift. It inspires awe when you see God work out a plan to bring us back to him despite the fact that we distanced ourselves from him. He did all this “when the time had fully come.” God’s love for us has a timeline – one that he planned in eternity and set in motion after the creation of the world. Time and timing are an important part of love.

## *A Time to Repent*

It is sad to see parents today that have selfishly abandoned their children. Parents are to reflect the nature of God who said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” It is also heartbreaking to see parent-child relationships crumble when children turn their backs on a home where love was there for them. Even more disturbing is seeing children of God turn away from the one who lavishes them with his love. Broken relationships are not what God created in the beginning, but our self-centered natures have gotten in the way. Our short-sightedness undermines our relationship with God.

Read **Luke 15:11-24**, The Story of the Prodigal Son (or better titled: The Waiting Father)

- *Identify ways people today respond just like that son in their relationship with their heavenly Father.*
- *Personally compare how you have responded like the prodigal son in your life. Then spend a moment in repentant prayer.*
- *Build from the example of the lavish love of the father in the story to illustrate the remarkable lavish love of our heavenly Father.*

Our heavenly Father created a perfectly wonderful world for us to show his love, but we turned our back on him. He now welcomes you as his child because of Christ’s love in action while he was on earth as our divine substitute. Continue to talk about and capture what is so amazing about our God and praise him for it.

**Micah 7:18-19** <sup>18</sup>*Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. <sup>19</sup>You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.*

## A Time to Renew

Being children of God is not merely a title but our identity. It is who we are. It is a gift to us as well as a responsibility entrusted to us. We are to be “stewards” of that gift by growing even closer to God. Time and time again history has seen that relationship with God deteriorate when people neglect or squander it. That is true of other relationships also. In order to “steward” these relationships, Jesus tells us to “*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.*” If I seek him first in my life, then whatever else I do will fall in line with that pursuit.

**Matthew 18:2-5** <sup>2</sup>*He called a little child and had him stand among them.* <sup>3</sup>*And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* <sup>4</sup>*Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

- Describe the attitude Jesus is looking for here.
- How do you think that should show itself in your life?

**Romans 8:14-17** <sup>14</sup>*Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.* <sup>15</sup>*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”* <sup>16</sup>*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.* <sup>17</sup>*Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

- Analyze the attitude Jesus is describing here.
- How do you think that should show itself in your life?

**1 John 3:2-3** <sup>2</sup>*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* <sup>3</sup>*Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

**Ephesians 5:1,8** <sup>1</sup>*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children* <sup>2</sup>*and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God . . .* <sup>8</sup>*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.*

- Explain the transformation Jesus is talking about here.
- How do you think that should show itself in your life?

## *A Time to Recommit*

Live your life “in view of God’s mercy.” Review regularly the Father’s care and Christ’s love. It is a window of God’s outstanding mercy toward us. Grow in awe of the pure grace he gives us as his children. If you are doing a multi-week course, the next couple studies will look at more aspects of how love takes time for relationships.

Do the following to get started:

- *Write down a timeline of your life so far. Fill in special events or situations that help you to identify and appreciate God’s lavish love in your life.*

Decide to commit yourself to re-ordering your time in a way that will build up the relationships God has given you. He blesses us as we break free of the pattern of the worldly culture around us and let the Holy Spirit transform our inner being. These studies will provide you with tools to re-order your time. Make a commitment to follow through in order to change the pattern of your life. Let it reflect the priorities set for you by Christ’s love.

- *Choose someone you can ask to hold you accountable: \_\_\_\_\_*

## *Prayer*