**Cell Lessons – The Father’s Love - #1**

**THE LOVE OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER**

**Ice Breaker:** Describe your earthly father. Maybe he was a good father. If so, what made him a good father. However, maybe he was not a good father. Without sharing anything you are not comfortable sharing, what made him a bad father?

**Scripture: Luke 15:11-32** (read)

**Lesson:** Many people call this parable of Jesus “the prodigal son,” but it also could be called the story of the loving father. Jesus taught this parable when the Jewish religious leaders complained that He was eating with tax collectors and sinners, people they considered unclean.

In the story, the younger son demands his share of the inheritance, he leaves his father’s house and spends the inheritance on himself. When he finds himself without money or friends, he takes a job feeding pigs. At some point he comes to himself. He realizes that the life he is living is not good for him. He remembers that in his father’s house, his father’s servants are taken care of better than he is. He decides to humble himself and return to his father’s house and become one of his father’s servants. When the son returns, his father does not treat him as a servant but a son. He runs to him and embraces him and throws a party. The son that was lost had returned.

This story describes the love that our heavenly Father has for us. All of us have found ourselves in situations where we have made decisions that have taken us away from God. In His love, God lets us go. He does not want to control or manipulate us. He is always thinking about us and waits for us to come to the realization that living in relationship with Him is better than anything the world has to offer. When we come to our self, we realize that what we thought would bring us happiness, security or love falls far short of the love God offers. He is waiting for us to come to this realization and when we take a step towards Him, He meets us with open arms. He restores our relationship with Him.

There is another son in this story. He is the older son. He has faithfully served his father and takes offense that his father receives the younger son without consequences. He complained, you have never thrown a party for me even though I have been faithful. Now this son that spent your inheritance comes home and you throw a party for him. The father replies, son, you have always been with me and everything I have is yours. Your brother has come home, and this is something to celebrate. God desires relationship with each of us. No matter how bad or how good we have been, He loves each of us and celebrates us as His family. This is the love of the Father. It’s a relationship He wants to have we each of us. He is our loving Father

**Discussion:** Have you ever had a “come to yourself” moment and realized that something in your life needed to change? If you are comfortable doing so, share this experience with the group. What changed? How did you find the courage to set your life on a different path?

**Ministry Time:** Minister to those in the group that have shared at a personal level. There may be those that need to come back to the Father. Give everyone the opportunity to do this. Allow the gifts of the Holy Spirit to operate through the group. Minister to one another.

**Cell Lessons – The Father’s Love - #2**

**THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION**

**Ice Breaker:** Have you or someone you know adopted or fostered as child? What were the joys? What were the challenges? Do you feel that the children that were adopted or fostered were fully embraced as family members?

***Scripture: Romans 8:15****For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.”*

***1 John 3:1*** *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.*

**Lesson:** All of us have been adopted by God as His children. He chose each one of us. As children of God, we are part of His family with all the blessings and promises that come with being in relationship with Him as our Father. We do not need to be afraid that he will reject us when we stumble or abandon us for someone else. We can live as sons and daughters with the security and confidence that comes from knowing that our Father loves us and is looking out for our best interests. He invites us to know Him as “Abba”, daddy. The picture is that of a small child running to their father with no fear of anything other than a warm welcome and a hug.

This is love in action. It is amazing that our creator God does not distance Himself from us as His creation but rather He embraces us and calls us His children. He has made us in His image. He has given us the ability to love. As He extends His love to us, His greatest joy is having us respond in love to Him. The world does not understand this kind of love. Much of the time, the world only loves as it benefits them. It is conditional upon our performance or response. However God loved us before we loved Him. He loved us before we were lovable. He loves us with our faults and the unique aspects of our personalities. He loves us simply because He is our Father and we are His children and there is nothing that we can do as His children that will change that. He may not like everything we do when we are disobedient, but His love never wavers. We may make some bad decisions, but this does not change His love toward us. He will never leave us, never forsake us, never reject us. This is the love that our Father has for us.

**Discussion:** How do you experience the love of our Father? When does He seem closest to you? If you are comfortable doing so, describe for the group how your heavenly Father’s love has ministered to you. Do you have a hard time receiving love or believing that loving you is possible? Why do you think this is? Describe experiences that you have had that told you that love was not possible. In the ministry time, renounce the lie that you are unlovable and embrace the unconditional love that the Father has for you

**Ministry Time:** Pray over each person in the group. Have each one come to the center one by one. Lay hands on them and pray and prophesy over them. As you minister, allow words of encouragement and affirmation to come. Pray blessing and invite the Father’s love to become real to those being prayed for.

**Cell Lessons – The Father’s Love - #3**

**CHOSEN AS SONS AND DAUGHTERS**

**Ice Breaker:** Last week our ice breaker question was about adopted children. This week the question is, how do you feel your identity has been shaped by the family you were born into? Are there family characteristics that everyone shares? Are you settled and secure in these relationships or are they a source of insecurity and strife?

***Scripture: Romans 8:16-17*** *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,****17****and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*

**Lesson:** Many times, the family we are born into shape how we view and relate to our heavenly Father. Our natural family dynamics shape how we relate to our spiritual family. Out of His love for us, our heavenly Father has chosen us as His children. He calls us His own. We are not outsiders wanting to get in, we are insiders with the rights and privileges of being part of His family. This is our identity. We live as Christ-like-ones or Christians. Identity means to be the same. When we identify with our Father and He with us, we come together in purpose, characteristics and values. The is the foundation or our unity with other believers. Together we form His family. Just as in the natural, many times children look and act like their parents, as God’s children, we look, and act like Him. The Bible tells us that we are made in His image. As we go deeper into the things of God, we begin to look more and more like Him. This is the way He planned for it to be. The Holy Spirit gives us the inner awareness that the Father loves us and that these things are true.

If we are God’s children, then we are His family. If we are His family, we can expect to participate in the inheritance He has prepared for us. This inheritance starts here in this life as we walk with God. We are able to enjoy the love, security, blessing and mercy our Father extends to us. We can live in His provision and rest in His care. We can trust in His ability to provide for us and know that no matter what happens, He will never leave us nor forsake us. Another part of His inheritance is that Christ is preparing a place to receive us as we enter into heaven. If we persevere in this life and remain in Christ, we gain entrance to our inheritance in the next life. This will be with Christ and we will be glorified with Him. As sons and daughters of God we have something to look forward to. Our Father has chosen each of us to receive this inheritance. This is love in action.

**Discussion:** At this point in your walk with Christ, do you identify more with Christ or more with the world? Maybe there are parts of your life that are more like Christ and other parts that are more like the world? What do you need to do to more fully identify with Christ? How does it feel to know that your heavenly Father chosen you to be His son or daughter? Are you comfortable receiving His love or do you find it hard to believe that this is so?

**Ministry Time:** Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to those that find it hard to accept that the Father loves them. Give time for His Spirit to witness to their spirit that this is so.

**Cell Lessons – The Father’s Love - #4**

**ONE WITH OUR FATHER**

**Ice Breaker:** Are there certain mannerisms that you share with your earthly father or mother? You may have mentioned these in previous lessons, but I encourage you to be more detailed. Do you say certain words or expressions that your parents or those that raised you use? Do you do particular things in the same ways? Has anyone ever said to you, that’s just like your father or just like your mother? If they said this, why?

***Scripture: John 17:23*** *I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.*

**Lesson:** Jesus is praying for us as believers in this passage. He prays that He would be in us just like the Father is in Him. This is so that we may be perfect as one. Of like mind. Of like heart. Of like spirit. Of like character. That when someone sees or interacts with one of us as believers, they are also seeing and interacting with Him. This is so that the world can see the love of God and know that God has sent Jesus into the world as His ultimate expression of His love. God loved mankind to the extent that He sent Jesus, the only Son of His own essence, so that whoever believes in Him will not die but will have eternal life. By this we know that God loves us and has provided a doorway to life. Because Christ is in us, we are perfected in His love. We are like Him in this way therefore love should be the primary characteristic in our interactions and relationships with the world. They will know that we are Christ-like-ones by our love for one another.

My natural family is characterized by a pioneering, entrepreneurial spirit. We tend not to walk with the crowd but are willing to make our own path. We can be stubborn and self-reliant. We like the challenge of starting things and finding our own way. I grew up in this family and it has shaped my life. I am my father’s son. I act like him in some ways and I think like him in others. I am not saying all this is good, just that my family has shaped who I am. In this same way we, as sons and daughters of God, carry the pattern of our heavenly Father. He shapes the way we interact with each other and with those in the world. As we draw closer to our heavenly Father, we become more and more like Him. Our minds begin to think His thoughts. His desires become our priorities, His ways become our own patterns and actions. We become like Him.

**Discussion:** How are you like God? This question may surprise you but if Christ is in us, then we are becoming like Him. Do you see this happening in your life? Are you a person who has a merciful heart? Then you get this heart from the mercy of God. Are you a person that is able to teach others the ways of God? You get this from Jesus who was the ultimate teacher. Are you patient, compassionate, giving, loving, caring, powerful, or wise? If you are any of these things, then you are just like your heavenly Father. So I ask the question again, how are you like God?

**Ministry Time:** Affirm the godly characteristics the group has shared. Pray for one another and ask that these God characteristics would be used to further His kingdom purpose for each person. Allow the gifts of the Holy Spirit to minister in the group.

**Cell Lessons – The Father’s Love - #5**

**NOTHING CAN SEPARATE**

**Ice Breaker:** Was love conditional in the home you grew up in? Was it based on your performance? When you did something good, were you recognized or rewarded? If you did something bad, were you punished and separated? Were you secure in the love of your parents even when you did something against their wishes?

***Scripture: Romans 8:38-39*** *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,****39****nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Lesson:** The love of our heavenly Father is so strong that nothing can separate us from it. This is a key aspect of our foundation in Christ. God’s love is not conditional based on our performance. God’s love is based in His decision to love us as His children. It is shown to us most clearly in the death and resurrection of Jesus. He did something that we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin, which separated us from God, and sacrificed himself for our sin making us acceptable to God. God has always loved us, but our sin separated us from Him. Jesus’ sacrifice removed the separation and made the way for God’s love to reach us as we enter into relationship with Him. This was God’s plan. This was God’s decision. It is a gift God has given to all those who believe in Jesus. This is love.

Paul writes in Romans that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Death nor life can separate us from His love. No spiritual being, either good or evil, can separate us from His love. Nothing in this present life or in the future life to come can separate us from His love. Nothing is too high or too deep to separate us from His love. No created thing can separate us from His love. His love is stronger than all of these things. The question is, do you believe this?

Many of us have trouble believing that God truly loves us. We have been conditioned to believe that we are unlovable. We believe that we have done too many bad things or that we do not deserve for God to love us. These kinds of thoughts are a lie from the enemy of our souls. He wants us to focus on our shortcomings and failures rather than on the love of God that covers our shortcomings and failures. Our heavenly Father loves us with an everlasting love. It is a love that never fails, and it is for each of us that believe on Jesus Christ as our savior.

**Discussion:** Do you believe that God loves you? Do you believe that nothing you do or have done makes you unlovable in God’s eyes? How does it feel to know that, no matter what happens or has happened in your life, God’s love for you will remain?

**Ministry Time:** Renounce the lie that you are unlovable. Make a decision to believe that God’s love is for you and that nothing can separate you from it. Pray for one another and allow the gifts of the Holy Spirit to move in your group.

**Cell Lessons – The Father’s Love - #6**

**OUR PERSONAL DESTINY**

**Ice Breaker:** Has your earthly father ever spoken a blessing over you? Has he encouraged you to pursue a good future that will benefit you and your family? Is it hard for you to see yourself as successful, blessed and happy? Do you anticipate better things in your future, or do you expect that tomorrow will look like today?

***Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11-13*** *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.****12****Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.****13****And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*

**Lesson:** In this passage, the prophet Jeremiah communicates the way God thinks towards us as His children. He says, I know the thoughts that I think toward you. They are thoughts of peace and rest for you and your family. They are not in any way evil or destructive. My thoughts are to give you a blessed future and a hope for prosperity and joy. So then, call upon Me. Go into your secret place and pray to Me and I will listen to your prayers. Seek Me in your life and you will find Me when you search for Me with all of your heart.

Your heavenly Father has a heart of blessing for you. He wants to give you his identity as His son or daughter. He has chosen you and you are His. He wants to bring meaning to your life. A life of peace, rest, joy and purpose. He extends His love toward you to give you hope, security, and a blessed future. He accepts you as you are. He forgives you when you sin or make a mistake. He honors you as His child. He invites us to call upon Him; to draw near to Him. To come to Him with our prayers and concerns. He desires to spend time with us so that we can listen to Him and hear His heart. His promise to us is that if we seek Him, we will find Him when we search for Him with everything inside us. This is an offer of blessing to us as His children. This is His intentions for us. His desire is that we live in the blessing of knowing we have a Father that loves and cares for us unconditionally and without reservation.

My prayer for you is that you would know the heart of love your heavenly Father has for you. May each of you experience His love. May you be blessed and may His favor rest upon you. May you find peace and rest in Him. May the hope and future He has for you come to pass. I pray that as you seek Him, that you will find Him and enter into all of His blessings.

**Discussion:** Do you believe that your heavenly Father wants to bless your life? Do you anticipate better things to come? What does it mean for you to know that you have a Father that wants be bless your life and family?

**Ministry Time:** Spend time praying blessing over each other. Lay hands on each person in the group and speak words of encouragement as you pray for one another. Wait on the Lord during this time and allow prophetic words to come for one another. Allow the Holy Spirit to minister the love of your heavenly Father to each person in your group.