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Appendix 1: *The Father Who Delights in You* © 2009 Living Seeds www.livingseeds.org Used by permission

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INTRODUCTION:

There is an old parable of an eagle raised in a chicken coop: because it was all he had ever known he thought like a chicken, behaved like a chicken and believed he WAS a chicken. But he was not: he was an eagle designed to soar high above the earthly limitations of the chicken coop into a whole different world of life and experience. In many ways my story mirrors that parable: I am a child of God who thought I was a failure, behaved like a failure and believed I was a failure until God got hold of me and taught me otherwise.

My earliest memory as a child is of being told I was a mistake and therefore unwanted. I never questioned it because I had nothing to compare it with – that was just how it was – but the sense of rejection, failure and blame for ‘ruining’ my mother’s life became rooted in my soul.

I always went to church but our normal congregation was the ‘Christian’ Spiritualist Church. I had no option to attend as my mother and grandmother always took me. Although I had little or no true Christian experience I always had a sense that what was happening was spiritually wrong. I remember being scared stiff when the elderly medium would go into a trance and begin to speak as a little girl or a grown man. I was even more scared when one night a ‘message’ came through for me – it appeared to be from my sister’s dead father – giving away a secret that only he and I knew. As a Christian adult I recognise the deception at work but if the enemy was trying to prove he was real to me, it actually had the completely opposite effect because at the tender age of 11 I began an earnest quest to find God for myself.

I wanted to go to a ‘real’ church and not knowing where to go, I went along with my cousins to the local Roman Catholic Church. I was learning Latin at school and became completely entranced by the mystery of the rituals, ancient language and smells. At the age of twelve I asked my parents if I could become a Catholic and as they were really of no opinion I began to make preparations. Then at New Year 1973 God suddenly broke into my life. I was staying with my sister and brother-in-law who were both committed Christians; they took me to a New Year’s Eve party that contained an epilogue Bible study on John chapter three. Through this I heard the gospel presented in a manner I could understand. I felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit calling me, as he called Nicodemus, to be born again. So on New Year’s Eve 1973 I gave my life to Jesus.

Back home again I carried on attending the Catholic Church but I had changed and I now wanted something that went beyond the beauty of the rituals and language – I wanted more of Jesus. I went to a Christian teacher at school and asked him whether we could form a Christian Union. He agreed and through that group I began to grow and develop in my faith. I played the piano for the songs and one day a boy asked me if I could go and play the piano for the young people’s group at the local Baptist Church. I did not know what a Baptist Church was but it felt right to go so I did. I then joined a church Bible study group and in October 1975 was baptised as a believer. I realise

now that whilst I had a great social life at the church with Christian young people of my own age, I was not disciplined, so did not really learn much more about what being a Christian really meant. For example I was never taught what a difference being a believer should have made to how I lived my life or that the Christian life included a winnable spiritual battle with an enemy whose power I had already seen and who I believed was equally powerful with God. In many ways I was set up to fail.

My relationship with my mother deteriorated. She was by this time practising as a medium herself and was not beyond casting spells on people against whom she had grievances. It was not at all easy being the only born again baptised believer in that house. My life was totally controlled by my mother – I was not allowed to choose my friends and I certainly was not allowed to move out and get a flat like other young people – so eventually I became desperate to break away. My way of escape came when at the tender age of 20 I married one of the boys from the Baptist Christian youth group. We moved away to where he was a schoolteacher and pastored a small Baptist church part-time. So I found myself catapulted from the sublime to the ridiculous as I became a pastor's wife living in a Manse. I entered into a marriage to escape a difficult home without thinking through the consequences and found myself not only with a husband I did not really love or want, a full-time job because we needed the money but also a very real part-time 'job' as pastor's wife that came with no set job description but many, many expectations. And basically I failed big style.

The marriage was doomed to failure from the start. My husband was a good friend but I never wanted him to be a lover as I did not love him. Very quickly we began sleeping in separate bedrooms as I could not bear him to touch me. He had also been brought up in an environment where his godly and submissive mother had devoted herself wholly to meeting his and his siblings' needs so it soon became plain that in addition to working full time, I was also expected to bake bread, cakes and pastries, sew and mend, keep the house meticulously clean and tidy, entertain and throw dinner parties where everything had to be home made and in my spare time conquer a garden that had not been touched in years. On top of this came the felt expectations of the church to which I was a constant disappointment. After three years of this life it began to feel like a loveless trap, I became depressed and began to dream of waking up somewhere else one day. It was like a voice screaming in my head to allow me to be myself and not the person everyone expected me to be which was really was not me at all. At work I talked about my situation and with the full approval of my Manager [which mattered a lot in those days] eventually moved out of the marital home into a rented room belonging to the mother of one of my work-mates. It was official I'd failed again. I had failed my husband, failed the church, failed our friends, failed our parents and I had especially failed God. One 'friend' wrote me a letter telling me how God hated divorce and that if I went ahead with this separation, there would be no way back for me. This was a lie but I believed it and so for the next four years I turned my back on God and tried to live my life without Him.

When I left my husband all my Christian 'friends' unanimously deserted me like rats deserting a sinking ship, with one exception, Trevor. He was single, almost 40 and still lived at home with his parents and through close observation of the breakdown of my marriage had come to realise that not everything is black and white, that there are shades of grey, and that some marriages – even Christian ones – can be abusive. He understood and remained my only Christian friend. We started 'going out' as companions together and eventually fell in love. I see this as the grace of God because I think without his friendship supporting me I would have crashed completely through what lay ahead.

In 1985 I moved out of my digs and bought a house of my own. It was completely run down [therefore cheap!], and the renovation project acted as a substitution in my life for the big hole left by cutting out being part of a church. I loved my independence and threw myself wholeheartedly into my career, quickly rising to become a Manager's Assistant as I made it clear to my bosses that I belonged 100% to the bank! This had its drawbacks e.g. being on 24-hour call for the alarm system, which meant night callouts to a branch twelve miles away. I hated returning to an empty house in the dark and began to be filled with fear of being attacked. My fears turned to reality one night in March 1986 when a gang of youths followed me home. I was too afraid to get out of the car and walk to my door so drove to a work colleague's house whose husband called the police. The next morning I wrote my car off and quickly spiralled downwards into depression. I was put on medication but even with sleeping tablets was too afraid to sleep. I would barricade myself into my bedroom and stay awake all night reading and then be too exhausted to do anything during the day. My career folded as I went on long-term sick leave; in fact, I only ever returned part time. During the nine months that followed Trevor and I became engaged and got married in 1987. Many of my fears were put to one side as he came to live with me but I was still very fragile especially mentally.

At the end of 1987 we sold my house and moved to Trevor's family home to live with his mother, aunt and uncle. We set about modernising the cottage and building a modern 'granny annexe' for the older folk to live in adjoining the main house. This was the period in which our children Matthew and Eddie were born. We were very happy and settled and all seemed right with our world except that as two Christians we had been leaving God out of our relationship. Trevor had never NOT gone to chapel – he could not avoid it as the chapel was in our back garden: it had been built by the family, maintained by the family and was eventually closed but Trevor had not been able to enthuse me to get involved; I just was not interested and did not want to go. The crunch for me came with the birth of the children. I felt the stirrings of my dormant faith when I felt God place a challenge before us: were we going to bring these children up in the Christian faith or to forget it forever?

The chapel in our garden was run and attended mainly by the family group who all lived together in our house so when it came to raising our children in the Lord we felt we needed to be part of a larger congregation. We realised that our breaking away to do so would raise a question mark over the viability of the chapel. This placed a great burden of responsibility upon us as well as

much perceived guilt at letting the previous generations down. However, in 1988 we joined the local Baptist Church in a much larger town nearby. It was only when we began attending a 'lively' church that we both realised how spiritually hungry we had become.

The first year Trevor joined the church's rolling discipleship programme and there was such a change in him that the second year I signed up too. Through this course we both recognised that God was calling us into whole time Christian ministry. I clearly remember the moment when I knelt before God and gave my life back to Him wholeheartedly. I deliberately laid my life on the altar before Him and gave Him permission to work in my life, doing whatever He needed to do, to make me the person He needed me to be to fulfil my destiny and my calling. It was easily prayed but I did not reckon on how God might take me literally. What happened to me next is best described as *'The dark night of the soul'*. I was suddenly plunged into a pit of the blackest depression. I had suffered depression twice before but this third attack within five years was by far the worst. Fuelled by my also catching a serious stomach bacterial infection, cryptosporidium, I spiralled downhill rapidly, and for a period of time I was barely able to walk unaided, unable to stand the daylight and confined largely to my bed. I was eventually diagnosed as also suffering from M.E.. I tried my best to carry on as normal looking after my small children but inwardly I was a mess and once again I felt a complete failure.

I was so ill and desperate to be well that I began a quest into New Age medicines. I tried every type of therapy and bought every type of medicine. I was completely hooked but failed to see that the 'healing' they brought was only ever temporary, in the end leaving me feeling worse than before. It was in this way that I dug myself deeper and deeper into the pit of deception and despair. I had repeated nightmares, which always involved me watching my own funeral and I began to contemplate that perhaps everyone would be better off without me. I battled with this sense of wanting to die for eighteen months but although I used to plan how it could be done, I was always too much of a coward to follow it through. This pit of despair was such a contrast with the spiritual euphoria of just a few months earlier. However, God knew what He was doing and I have since learned that there is only one way to get to the Promised Land and that is by travelling through the wilderness because it is there that God really works on us, removing the dross of our previous life; honing our character, shaping and preparing us for what lies ahead.

I clearly remember one Sunday morning when I just sat in church feeling very alone and isolated whilst the service went on as usual all around me. There were close to four hundred people in the sanctuary that morning but as far as I was concerned I might as well have been the only one. However God spoke to me quite clearly. Our minister was preaching on Psalm 51: *'Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me.'* I had not prayed in eighteen months but that morning I sincerely prayed that Psalm and God heard and answered my prayer. At the end of the service a couple came up to me and were very keen to come and pray with me for healing. I remember being horrified at the thought and even worse – they wanted to bring a real Baptist 'healer' with them! However, by this time my feelings of low self-esteem were so bad that I felt trapped and just resigned myself to putting up with this forthcoming 'ministry'. A date was set and

the evening duly arrived. The healer, who at that time had an international healing ministry within the Baptist denomination, encouraged me to work through something like the New Beginnings Baggage Checklist¹ part of which deals with generational sin and ungodly inherited characteristics. The Holy Spirit had caused him to discern my occult heritage. As he prayed I experienced an enormous weight pressing down on my head that was so severe it almost knocked me over. I later learned this was a manifestation of a deliverance taking place. As he went out of the door he left me with a scripture, Psalm 107:43 '*Whoever is wise, let him...consider the great love of the LORD*'.

When I awoke the next morning the fog in my mind had cleared enough for me to be able to begin to read God's Word again and I now had a real hunger and thirst to do so. As I lay in bed I began to meditate on 'the great love of the Lord' and through reading Neil Anderson's books *Victory over the Darkness*² and *The Bondage Breaker*³ I realised just how much God really *did* love me. I understood the truth that my identity was in being an accepted, secure and significant child of God and not in being a mistake; an unwanted and repeated failure.

One night I stayed up until 2 a.m. praying. During that night I flushed £150 worth of New Age medicine down the toilet; I wrote letters to those I had hurt asking them to forgive me; I repented of my occult past; I renounced the lies I had been believing about myself, about God and even about Satan and his powers. I awoke the next morning completely well. In fact it was not until about 9 a.m. that I suddenly realised I could see clearly, my limbs no longer ached, my headache was gone and I actually felt 'normal'. Hallelujah! Immediately I received in my spirit a call to preach and share the good news of what God had done in my life and I have never looked back since. That was all more than two decades ago and although I recognise that I still have a depressive tendency – especially when I am tired – I have been equipped to recognise the enemy's strategy against my life and ministry and immediately take authority over my thoughts, renouncing the lies and announcing the truth.

In 1993 Trevor and I began working in Gloucestershire as missionaries with *The Fellowship for Evangelising Britain's Villages* (now re-named *Village Hope*). In 1998 we moved to the Eden Valley area of Cumbria where we founded a Prayer House. From 2001 I worked for seven years with Neil Anderson's *Freedom in Christ Ministries* equipping churches in matters relating to spiritual freedom. Also from 2001 Father God began to teach our Prayer House team about the ways of His Kingdom: holiness, righteousness, justice, prayer, worship and obedience. The team learned to listen to God's voice corporately and implement His strategy for prayer and outreach day by day, week by week, year by year together in community. *New Beginnings Discipleship* grew out of the Prayer House as I was invited more and more to counsel and pray with others, who like myself, also had unresolved issues from their past that were holding them back from entering into the abundant life Jesus offers to His followers.

¹ See www.newbeginningsdiscipleship.com.

² N.T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, Monarch Books, Oxford, 1994, 2000.

³ N.T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, Monarch Books, Oxford, 2000, 2007.

It is not unusual to find individuals who are hungry for God and long to go deeper in their relationship with Him but because of their past experiences are held back. Many life-long Christians just assume everyone comes from the same background as them, thinks the same way and either already knows or will quickly pick up what they know about God and the Bible. **But it does not readily happen like that!** We need to teach and equip people in the truth that sets them free and walk with them along the road as Jesus helps them become established in it.

I have not made myself vulnerable to you by telling you all my sorry story because I am proud of it or want to somehow revel in it. Rather, my purpose is to highlight to you how the enemy gains ground in our lives from very early on, from childhood usually, and then regularly works through circumstances, people and events to conspire to keep on compounding that foothold until eventually it becomes a stronghold in our thinking and behaviour. Perhaps my example is extreme but each of us comes into God's Kingdom from our own spiritual 'Egypt' where before we knew Jesus we unintentionally served a different master. We also have a personal Promised Land, a spiritual destiny that was written for us before we were formed in our mother's womb, but before God can fully use us, He takes us through the desert; a place where He literally takes the bonds of 'Egypt' and its ways of thinking and behaving out of us. During this time He teaches us how to humbly, meekly and obediently follow His leading.

I was set free from years of oppressive spiritual bondage having been held back in my faith by my past and kept as a spiritual baby for more than 20 years. Once I was taught the truth about God, Satan and the Bible I instantly grew up - it was just as if someone had switched on the light in a darkened room. I matured into someone who had learned not only how the enemy worked but also how he could easily be overcome. This book contains the tools to help my experience become yours too.

Following Jesus is not always straightforward or easy; in fact true disciples are called by Jesus to deny themselves, take up their cross daily⁴ and follow hard in the dust of His footsteps. His own obedience led to the Cross. How much more then should we realise that to enter into our destiny and soar with Him into the heights He has ordained for us there will be a degree of spiritual battle for us to first overcome in. The desert is a harsh place with little to offer in terms of comfort or sustenance; it was also the place where Jesus faced His great testing before He was released into His years of ministry. Therefore do not expect this discipleship process to be an easy or straightforward journey. It will be tough and uncomfortable for you in places but let me encourage you to persevere, especially through weeks 4-8 when the going gets especially challenging. Once you have pressed through that demanding material what follows is lighter and gradually builds towards the goal of becoming a multiplying disciple. The objective is to faithfully learn, understand & apply the message and power of the Kingdom of God.

The course format is divided up into weeks, each containing five study days with the idea that the two remaining days are either for rest or catch up. This is done simply because the course must

⁴ Luke 9:23.

have some structure but it is not meant to be unswervingly followed. Please feel free to do it as it suits you best e.g. one lesson a day or one lesson every two or three days etc. Do not allow yourself to be pressurized by the structure. The point is not how quickly you complete the material but rather how deeply you work through it and how seriously you apply the lessons learned. So in your quest for freedom, please feel free to only do what you can do each day. It really does not matter if it takes you six months to complete the lessons as long as you have done the work seriously.

I can truly say that next to finding Jesus as my Saviour, entering into the fullness of my spiritual freedom in Christ has been the most significant moment of my life. Now I am free to soar with Him to heights of life, vision and purpose I always thought were only for other people. My prayer is that through this book my experience may be true for you too.

WEEK 1: DAY 1 Longing for more...

In buying this book you clearly want to give time to the deepening of your personal relationship with Father God, so in the space below summarize in just a few words *WHY* you are making this new beginning and what you hope to gain from the experience.

Hopefully you are responding to the work of God's Holy Spirit drawing you, beckoning you, towards a deeper relationship.

Perhaps the Holy Spirit (*spirit means 'breath'*) breathed over your life and began to draw you closer; perhaps you saw the power of God at work in the lives of others and you were hungry for what they have or perhaps you listened to someone talking or read the Bible and all the time there was something like a divine energy pumping in your spirit – you thought you might explode! You found yourself able to hear and really understand God's word in a very different way to previously; you understood in your heart that instead of having it all 'together' you are actually in real deep need of spiritual help and you just long for more of Him in your life.

If you did not know already then all of these things: what you experienced, saw, heard or read began to convince you that God is a very real, personal, alive exciting and powerful person, a Father actually, who lovingly and protectively watches over you. Think about this: Father God longs to have a deeper relationship with you even more than you desire one with Him.

Read Genesis chapters 1-3.

Why do you think Father God longs for us to recognise we need Him?

'...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...' Romans 3:23

Father God created us to have a very close relationship with Him where we would be secure, have a real significance and purpose for life and where He expected to be responsible to meet all our

daily needs. But Adam and Eve blew it; they chose to live independently of Him. Because we are all their descendants we, too, have inherited a nature that pushes us to live independently of Father God. This is why we have to search so hard for our own significance and work every day to earn money to meet our own daily needs. The miracle is that in all this time Father God has never stopped loving us and longing for us to walk, talk and be dependent on Him every day, just as Adam and Eve did in the beginning. The Bible shows us that because of the depth of Father's love for us, when the time was right, He took a very serious step in order that we might all be able to know and understand that love for ourselves and restore our broken relationship with Him.

Read John 3:1-21.

What was this serious step?

Why did He do it?

Almost all the Bible was originally written down in Hebrew. Scholars have proved that our modern English (Roman) script has evolved over centuries from the Hebrew 'aleph-bet' which we know as 'alphabet'. Originally Hebrew, like all ancient languages, was written as a series of pictures. The pictures that make up the word 'love' teach us quite a lot about the nature of being a father: that love should be the centre of a father's character; love should be the window through which we see a father's heart or that true love is a father's heart revealed.

Read Luke 15:11-32.

What is revealed of Father God's heart towards us in this story?

Read 1 John 4:9-10.

What do you think these verses mean?

Jesus is the window through which we see and experience Father God's heart; in Jesus, His miraculous birth, spirit-led life, sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, Father God's heart for us, for you, for the whole world is revealed. Please understand HE LOVES YOU! He *LOVES* you! He loves *YOU!*

REFLECT:

Go to the website www.newbeginningsdiscipleship.com and either register an account or log-in if you already have an account. In the My Community section of the site you will be able to download the music track *The Father Who Delights in You* courtesy of Living Seeds.

Listen to this now. Shut your eyes and allow the truth that you are deeply loved by God wash over you afresh; take the time to allow this truth to penetrate deep into your spirit.

Worship Father God by telling Him you love Him too: thank Him for sending Jesus so that our broken relationship is now restored and that we have been given the freedom in Him to go deeper.

CHALLENGE:

Tell someone you meet today that Father God loves *them* too.

WEEK 1: DAY 2 The Godhead

Father God loves us. There is nothing any of us can do that is so bad that will prevent His love from continually flowing down to us; it is a never-ending stream. However, there are often things we say and do which create a barrier between us and God for a while which means we may no longer receive or *FEEL* His love so readily. This is because Father God is totally holy and when we sin this comes between us and Him and forms a barrier.

Read Luke 3:21-22.

How did Father God's presence show itself in these verses?

When Jesus was baptised the Holy Spirit came down on Him in the form of a dove. The word translated into English here as 'Holy Spirit' means 'one who comes alongside'. When we enter Father God's family He places the Holy Spirit right inside us. In this way He has 'come alongside' us. It is He who calls Father's word into our ear; words of love, encouragement, comfort, direction, revelation, correction, warning and instruction. This close proximity of the Spirit can be pictured like a dove sitting on our shoulder; whenever we do or say something wrong it is as if He flies off our shoulder for a while and hovers close by rather than nuzzling right up close. He is still speaking to us and remains very close at hand but because of the distance created by the barrier of our sin it becomes harder to hear Father's whispers. The closeness of relationship has been disturbed. This distance will be there until we obey the 'calling alongside' of the Holy Spirit and confess our sin to God. Immediately we do this it is as if the dove flies back into position and the closeness of our relationship with Father God is restored. All of us have to learn how to walk in a way that does not offend the delicate presence of the Holy Spirit dove; to live in a way that pleases Father God. This is a process that takes time so try not to be too hard on yourself when you keep messing up!

In the passage above what was it Father God said to Jesus?

Look up these verses: Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 42:1.

Who do you think they refer to?

In the light of these verses what might be the significance of Father God speaking these words at Jesus' baptism?

In modern computer-speak, Father God was 'hyper-texting'; He highlighted or 'clicked' on two well-known and important Scriptures from the Hebrew Bible [our Old Testament] that prophesied the coming of Messiah and verbally applied them to Jesus. The Jewish crowd who would have known these Scriptures well, who witnessed this event and heard the audible voice of Father God, would have been left in no doubt as to what was being said about Jesus: God Himself was declaring this man, this living breathing human being, to be the very one they had been looking for; the Servant, the Anointed One, Messiah. So Jesus' true identity is revealed by Father God. He is Messiah. He is Father's Son. Father is pleased with Him. When we come into God's family we do so by acknowledging who Jesus is [that He is God's Son, Messiah, that He is alive today] and our genuine need of Him. As we humble ourselves and confess our sin, Father God forgives and cleanses us; He not only reconnects our spirit with His, we also have the assurance that He is constantly with us by the close warm presence of our companion and helper the Holy Spirit.

'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!' 1 John 3:1

The good news is that those Father God loves are *also* His children. We are part of one huge family!

Look up the word 'lavish' in a dictionary. Write down what it means.

When someone gives us something and they are overly generous or extravagant we feel blessed, humbled and very special indeed. Father's heart of love towards YOU is so great, so vast, so generous, so abundant and so extravagant. He really wants you to know how much He loves YOU!

REFLECT:

Find a quiet place where you can spend ten minutes alone with Father God. Read Luke 3:22 again. Hear the voice of Father God speaking over you: *"YOU are My Child, whom I LOVE; with YOU I am WELL PLEASED."* Perhaps listen to the Father Who Delights in You track again.

As you are quiet, acknowledge the close presence of the Holy Spirit; thank Father God for sending Jesus. Worship the trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

CHALLENGE:

Do something 'lavish' or 'extravagant' for someone in your church or small group today that demonstrates how much Father God loves them.

WEEK 1: DAY 3 Father's heart of love

Perhaps you find it very difficult to relate to God as a loving, generous, extravagant Father who longs to have a deeper relationship with you. Perhaps you are even backing away in your mind at the very thought that someone calling Himself 'father' might want any sort of close 'relationship' with you. Sometimes we find it difficult to relate to God as Father because our view of God and perspective of what a 'relationship' with Him might be has been shaped or even marred by our experience of relationships with our earthly fathers or significant authority figures. Even the very best of dads, and thankfully there are many, cannot fully demonstrate Father God's character because we are, after all, human.

If our experience of a parent has been someone mean, cruel or abusive towards us then we can subconsciously project that same characteristic onto Father God which is a significant barrier to us being able to fully understand how much we are loved and to receive it. The problem is that whilst our bad experience may, sadly, be true of our earthly parent it is NOT true of our Father God. It is a lie.

Look up John 10:10.

Who is it who is robbing you of this close relationship with God as Father?

By believing the lie we are, without realising it, agreeing with a deception put into our thoughts by our spiritual enemy Satan! Until the lie is broken we actually *cannot accept the truth* of what the Bible teaches us about Father God's heart of love towards us. We are being robbed.

Look over the following list slowly. Stop at each word or phrase and prayerfully consider whether you have ever thought of God in that way. Tick the statements that are relevant to how you have viewed Father God.

Distant	Impatient	Demanding
Insensitive	Never satisfied with me	Fault-finding
Harsh or cruel	Abusive	Never there for me
Stern or angry	A spoil sport	Too busy for me
Cold	Controlling	Condemning
Uncaring or unconcerned	Manipulative	Unforgiving
Perfectionistic	Cunning	An abuser

Not one of these statements is true of Father God. If you have ticked some boxes then it is a very good idea right now to verbally renounce (which means give up or stop believing) those lies. But before you do please listen again to the love letter from Father God which you have downloaded *The Father Who Delights in You* or read the words of the track that are reproduced in appendix 1. Each of these statements comes from the Bible.

EXERCISE:

For each negative box you have ticked above search appendix 1 to find a positive statement which counteracts it.

Take a separate sheet of paper and draw a line down the middle.

Write the negatives you have ticked on the left-hand side and the positives from Father God's love letter to you on the right.

Write the following wording at the top of the left-hand column:

I renounce the lie that my Father God is ...

Write these words at the top of the right-hand column:

I choose to accept the wonderful truth that my Father God is ...

Now begin to pray your renunciation and declaration OUT LOUD over your life. Say it several times so that you hear yourself say it. The Bible says it is God's truth that sets us free; what you are declaring is TRUTH. Choose today to allow your thinking about Father God to be re-aligned with what the Bible says is His heart towards you.

Because you have believed these lies for a very long time do not be surprised if it takes some time (a few weeks) before you really begin to *feel* deep in your spirit that Father God loves and accepts you. Be persistent. Keep saying the same renunciation and declaration every day until you know the blockage has gone.

It is possible this exercise may have re-opened a wound you thought you had dealt with and that will have been painful for you. For the time being, choose to let your focus be on the relationship Father God is calling you to; determine to grow deeper in Him and try not to allow yourself to be distracted from that ambition. This is the day of new beginnings...

REFLECT:

After you have said your prayer each day make sure you take ten minutes to focus quietly on Father God. Play the *The Father Who Delights in You* track and allow God's word to penetrate deep into your spirit.

WEEK 1: DAY 4 Deepening our relationship

The deepest relationships are those where people have reached a stage of mutual vulnerability; a level of trust and faithfulness has been reached where even the deep secrets of our heart can be shared easily. This is a true friend. Father God wants us to reach a place in our relationship with Him where we not only share our private thoughts with Him but where He can also entrust us with the secrets and longings of His heart in order for us to put them into action. This is the ideal – but strong relationships do not just happen, they are built over many years.

Write down some of the reasons relationships fail.

One-sided relationships tend to fizzle out. To be strong and enduring relationships need to be worked at consistently, with commitment from both sides. Be assured Father God has already done everything He needs to do to show us the depth of His commitment to our mutual relationship.

Write down what you think He has done.

Look again at the story of the loving father in Luke 15:11-32. When he returned to his family, where did the rebellious son find himself [verse 20]? In his father's arms! And this was even before he had said his much-rehearsed speech! Patiently, constantly, steadfastly, lovingly his father had been waiting, searching the horizon every day, for a glimpse of his son so that he could scoop him up into his arms, swing him round, shower him with kisses and just love him. This is a perfect picture of Father God's heart towards us. Before we even give Him a thought He is already waiting for us. What He wants, more than anything, is for us to position ourselves in the place where we can feel and respond to His overwhelming desire to show us his love.

Where might our spiritual 'home' be; the place where Father God longs for us to be?

Our 'home' is in His 'arms'; the place where we have the assurance and know the strength and security of His love for us. Father God's heart towards us is one of complete acceptance and love. When we truly know His love we will be completely unshakeable for God's Kingdom.

Father God has already pursued us by sending His only Son; whose responsibility is it to 'work' at the relationship now?

In the story, the father would still be waiting today if the son had not previously *resolved* to go home [verses 17-20]. We too must determine to pursue and deepen our relationship with God as Father. All relationships, friendships, sharing, trust and intimacy grow as we resolve to spend more time together. This is also true of our relationship with Father God. We cannot expect Father to share the precious things of His heart with us if we are not in a place of close relationship or intimacy with Him.

Read James 4:8a.

In the next group session we will look at a number of examples from Scripture of different ways of drawing closer to Father God. For now, have a go at writing down your own ideas of how you think we can draw nearer to God.

In what ways can we draw nearer to Father God?

Although there are different ways of relating to God they are also inter-connected:

- ▶▶ When we worship and praise God we are actually praying. We might even be using words straight from the Bible to do so;
- ▶▶ When we open our hearts to read the Bible God speaks to us; it is a *living* word. As He speaks, so our hearts turn back to Him in worship and praise for what He has said.

As we journey through this book together we will be looking at some of these areas. If you are still hungry in a certain area when you have completed this study then New Beginnings Discipleship has other courses that teach into each of these areas in more depth.

Read Deuteronomy 6:5.

REFLECT:

Allow this Scripture to guide your worship and prayer today.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you.

One common reason relationships flounder is lack of quality time spent with one another. We need to be not only determined but also disciplined to pursue our relationship with Father God or it will not happen. Make a pie chart of the 24 hours in a day and fill in how you spend your time on an average day in an average week. You can be honest because no one will see it but you. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what changes you might need to make and where you can do that in order to prioritise your relationship with Father God.

WEEK 1: DAY 5 Connecting with God

Look up some of the following Scriptures (if you have time then look them all up): Matthew 11:25-27; 16:17; 26:39; Mark 13:32; 14:36 Luke 10:21-22; 23:46; 24:49; John 1:14; 3:35; 5:18-26; 6:27; 6:37; 6:44-46; 8:16-19; 8:28-29; 10:15-18; 10:30; 10:38; 11:41; 12:49-50; 14:6-11; 14: 16-17; 14:23-26; 14:31; 15:26; 16:15; 16:28-17:5; 17:21.

What do you see that is special in the way Jesus relates to Father God and the Holy Spirit?

What conclusion do you come to about their relationship?

So is God schizophrenic or does He have multiple personalities? Is He confused about His identity? Absolutely NOT!

Read Deuteronomy 6:4.

Take five minutes to read through appendix 2: *God's Awesome Name*. We worship one God but with three different expressions: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We can relate this to our own experience in this way: my children know me as their mother; my parents know me as their daughter and those I disciple know me as one who helps or teaches them things; but I am not three different people I am one. So it is with the God-head; the three different expressions co-exist as one whole spiritual entity: God.

Read Genesis 1:1-2 and Colossians 1:13-17.

The Hebrew word translated in Genesis 1:1 as 'God' (*elohim*) is a plural that only applies when there are more than two. This shows clearly that the whole godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, were all intimately involved right from the very beginning but each with a different role to play. Eventually Father God sent Jesus to be the physical manifestation of His heart as both His Son and a human man. Jesus was not a god dressed up in a human-looking costume pretending to be a man like the gods of Greek mythology. He was totally a man. It was His choice to lay aside His

glory in the God-head and take on the serious limitations of being a man – the same limitations we have to live with every day. Unlike us, Jesus was a completely open vessel for Father God to use and direct which is why He was so full of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, although He was tempted to sin He always resisted. This is how He was able to be the perfect sinless sacrifice for our sins – the fulfilment of the Old Testament Passover lamb [see *Exodus 12:21-23; 1 Corinthians 5:7*]. Truly Jesus was a surrendered man; He had no heart to do anything other than put into practice His heavenly Father’s will. The Son honoured His Father by faithfully and obediently doing His will. He knew what that will was because He never did anything that offended the presence of the Holy Spirit dove. It never left Him therefore Father God’s voice was never silent, distant or faint. As the Holy Spirit whispered Father’s instructions into His ear Jesus was totally focused to put them into practice. Because of the constant presence of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, Father’s power was released through Jesus, His obedient and faithful servant, to heal, set free, perform miracles and powerfully announce the in-breaking arrival of Father God’s long-awaited Messianic Kingdom. We cannot and should not attempt to separate out the different aspects of the God-head; all are inter-related and move throughout the earth as one cohesive being fully intent on one purpose which is to see God’s Kingdom established – i.e. His righteous reign and rule over the earth and the nations of the world. This is done today through us in the exact manner modelled for us by Jesus: through humility, love, surrender, faithfulness to God and obedience. Because Jesus is the one Father God has exalted to the highest place and whose name is above every name [see *Phil.2:9-11*], we approach Father God using Jesus’ name, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. God is one God but He uses every aspect of His character to draw us closer to His arms of love.

Even though Jesus knew Father God so much more intimately than we do, even He constantly took time to be alone with Him.

Re-read some of the Scriptures we read earlier and note just how much time Jesus spent connecting with His Father God.

If Jesus took this so seriously then how much more should we!

Read Matthew 6:5-13.

What is prayer? Write down your thoughts.

Prayer is making a heart-connection with Father God in a way that is real, not just religious or ritualistic. 'Prayer' includes worship (singing, adoration), praise, asking, intercession, weeping, being still and silent, seeking Father God's will, listening to His voice and reading the Scriptures. Jesus said we are to take time to do this in a quiet private space. Above all when we pray we are to do so with a heart that is ready to obey God.

REFLECT:

Find a quiet place where you can be alone and determine to make a new beginning in your prayer life today, a heart to heart connection with Father God. Listen again to the track: *The Father Who Delights in You*.

Spend some time in silence but still focussed on God. What is Father saying to you today? Are you ready to obey?