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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 eleven 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. 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 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 enthruse me to get involved; I was just 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

¹ See www.newbeginningsdiscipleship.com.

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 three 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.

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**

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.

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 course 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 and 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 content must 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

⁴ Luke 9:23.

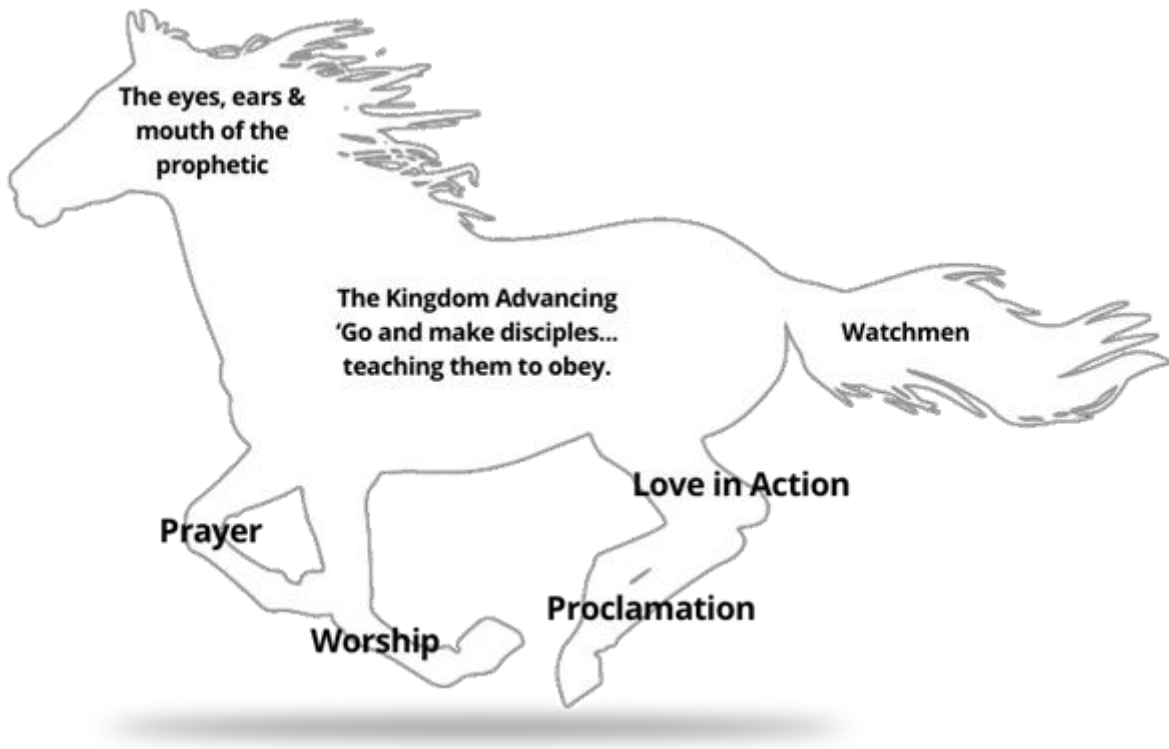
how deeply you work through it and how seriously you apply the lessons learned. So, in your quest for freedom, please feel free to only do what you can do each day. It really does not matter if it takes you six months to complete the lessons as long as you have done the work seriously.

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 course my experience may be true for you too.

Sarah Winbow

WEEK 1: GROUP SESSION

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?



What does the Horse of the Lord represent?

Matthew 11:12.

What might this mean?.

This force is not armaments or holy war but love, humility and servanthood.

Matthew 25:34-46.

What is a disciple?

Mark 2:18.

Identify different types of disciples in our society today.

Hebrews 13:7.

What is meant by the word 'Imitate' here?

Matthew 4:19; 9:9; John 1:43.

What might Jesus be implying in the words 'follow me'?

The words 'follow me' literally mean 'walk after me' which is better translated for us as 'walk in the manner in which I walk'.

Where did Jesus' walk lead Him?

Luke 9:23-24; 14:26-33.

Who or what should have first priority in our lives?

2 Corinthians 4:7-12.

What might Paul mean?

John 10:10.

How do we live an abundant life?

What single thing characterises the life of someone who truly seeks to walk in Jesus' dust?

Deuteronomy 6:3.

If we wish to be blessed and prosper in every aspect of life then we must not only hear God's Word with our ears but must also have hearts that leap to accept the moral responsibility to put that Word into practice.

Matthew 11:29-30.

PRAISE

Psalm 8:2.

What has God has ordained us to do?

What does 'praise' mean?

What does 'ordain' mean?

As God's praise is established on the lips of His children it silences the enemy!

Psalm 150.

How do we praise?

Make a list of all the good things God has done in your life.

Praise God by speaking the things on your list back to Him.

WEEK 1: DAY 1 Longing for more...

In committing to be part of the *New Beginnings Discipleship Training School* 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 process.

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 the '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 *The Father Who Delights in You* 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.

Read 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.

Have a go at writing down your own ideas of how you think we can draw nearer to 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 course 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.

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.

REFLECT

Read Deuteronomy 6:5.

Allow this Scripture to guide your worship and prayer today.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you.

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 3 *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 into 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?

WEEK 2: GROUP SESSION

MANAGING TIME

*We each have the same 24 hours available to us every day. **Everyone** has many demands made on their time during those 24 hours, e.g., caring for children or parents, chores, shopping, meals, work, voluntary commitments [pastoral or social projects, worship, prayer, bible study, various meetings, Christian community, etc.].*

How is it that some people manage to achieve a lot with their time and others do not?

What is your perception of 'discipline'?

Luke 9:23 and 14:26-27.

How did we define being a disciple?

Disciple and discipline are related words.

A disciple is ...

Discipline is ...

Deuteronomy 8:5; Proverbs 3:11-12; Hebrews 12:5-13.

What do these verses tell us about discipline in God's Kingdom?

Discipline is for our own spiritual growth and development.

RECEIVING FATHER'S LOVE

Look at Appendix 2: *God's Love Tap Pictures* at the back of this Disciple's Workbook. Look at image 1.

What does this illustrate?

Psalm 100:4.

How do we begin to draw closer to God's presence and receive His love?

WORSHIP

What is the difference between praise and worship? What is worship?

What does it mean to say we worship someone or something?

Praise = words that extol God's achievements and/or give thanks for His goodness.

Psalm 20:5; 33:3; 35:27; 47:1; 65:13.

The word 'worship' is commonly used as an overarching word to cover many different ways of approaching God.

Heart-worship is ...

1 Kings 18:39; 2 Chronicles 20:18; Psalm 95:6; 96:9; 99:5; Revelation 7:11.

What do you think kneeling, bowing down and falling prostrate might signify?

What do you think it might mean to 'tremble' before the Lord?

What do you think it might mean to worship God in the 'splendour of His holiness'?

When we get our perspective of who God is correctly aligned with what is written about Him in the scriptures and then allow words or songs of love, adoration, devotion, exaltation, reverence and awe to come out of our mouths, we are beginning to worship God heart-to-heart.

James 4:8.

What reassurance does this verse give us as we draw near to God?

John 4:24; Ephesians 3:14-21.

What is the level Father means to fill us with His love?

Hebrews 13:15.

What does this mean for us today?

Our whole life [every aspect of every day] should be part of our daily perpetual offering of worship to God; not just the 10 minutes here or there which we deliberately set aside for a special time to sing, pray or read the scriptures.

Matthew 6:5-6.

Look again at Appendix 2: *God's Love Tap Pictures*. This time look at image 2.

What does this signify?

God's love flows to us from the great vast reservoir of His love. When our 'vessels' are correctly positioned His love flows into us. His love then flows out through us into the lives of others as we allow His Spirit to use and direct us.

WEEK 2: DAY 1 Father's love (1)

Father God loves us. That is the truth. It is a truly awesome thing that we as individuals can know Father God's heart of love for us intimately and personally. But the story of the Bible, from the Garden of Eden right through to the end of Revelation, reveals that Father's heart of love is not only towards individuals, in fact the most enduring demonstration of His love is towards a whole nation; those He called to be His own bride, the Hebrew people. The allegory of the life of Hosea the prophet and the Song of Songs are two biblical books that record for us the faithfulness, depth and passion of Father's heart of love to this often faithless and rebellious nation. Even so, Father God has not given up on them.

Read Jeremiah 31:31-33; Romans 10:9-13; 11:15-end; Ephesians 2:11-15.

Write down a summary of what you understand of Father's heart towards the Hebrews from these verses.

Amazingly, Father God still has a special place and plan in His heart for the Jews. Jesus' sacrificial death is the 'blood' of the New Covenant mentioned in Jeremiah 31:31-33. The Jewish faith is the nourishing spiritual 'root' (Romans 11:18) that supports its offshoot, Christianity, and not the other way around. It is only because of the Jews' continued blindness to not 'see' that Jesus was, and still is, their long-awaited Messiah that for a limited period of time [the past 2,000 years!] Father God's love and grace [undeserved favour] has been poured out on the Gentile nations allowing us to also become His sons and daughters. We are the grafted in wild olive (Romans 11:17). In horticulture, a graft provokes something in the nature of a formerly barren tree that turns it around so that it becomes fruitful. Sadly, the way in which the historic church has mistreated and persecuted the Jews has done very little to provoke them to believe in the Jesus we have portrayed. However, we are living in very significant days for the fulfilment of Father God's promises to His people: I believe God is about to use those who honour and understand the nourishing 'sap' flowing to us from the Hebraic roots of Christianity to demonstrate the truth and power of His enduring goodness, faithfulness and deep love to His chosen nation in some very special ways. There will be something in the context and circumstances of the days we are entering that will demonstrate to the Jews that we really do serve the same supernatural God whose love and Father heart towards them is the same yesterday, today and forever. The sacrificial love extended towards the Jews across the world by the Gentile believers during these last days will, I believe, be a catalyst for millions to have their

spiritual eyes opened to recognise Jesus for themselves. It will be from the coming together of the Messianic and Gentile believers that Father God will form one new man [Ephesians 2:11-15]. In that way, all of God's believing children will be saved [Romans 11:25-26]. Father God's love endures forever!

Look up 2 Chronicles 5:13; 7:3; 20:21; Psalm 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:1.

In the Hebrew text there is actually no word in any of the above passages that is translated into English as 'endures'. It simply says 'God loves forever'. The word 'endure' has been inserted by translators and is clearly meant to emphasise Father God's faithfulness to continually love, even persist, as the dictionary meaning implies, through the pain of much rejection – even the rejection of His Son, the Anointed One, Messiah.

One of the main reasons the Jews failed to recognise Jesus as Messiah when He came was the manner of His coming and His message.

Look up Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 16:5; Numbers 24:17-19; 2 Samuel 7:12-13; Psalm 2:6-9; 45:6; Isaiah 9:6-7; Micah 4:3; 5:2; Matthew 11:2-3.

What expectations might the Jews have had of their Messiah?

The Jews generally, including John the Baptist, expected Messiah to be a king, sitting on a literal throne in Jerusalem reigning over a specific kingdom – their homeland. They expected a ruler who would use God's fire to establish justice, settle disputes, bring peace, crush Israel's enemies and bring long awaited deliverance from generations of oppression. In His first coming Jesus did not do this which is why even John the Baptist sent messengers from prison to ask Jesus if He really was Messiah.

What was Jesus' reply? Matthew 11:4-6.

Jesus clearly fulfilled all that was prophesied about the nature and manner of Messiah's coming, i.e., he was born in Bethlehem, a descendant of David's line, lived as a true servant, brought deliverance,

healed the sick, performed miracles by the Spirit of God, rode into Jerusalem on a colt as a king, suffered, died and rose again.

What was the 'message' Jesus preached? Matthew 4:23.

The reason the Jews failed to recognise Jesus as Messiah was because they could not reconcile the picture of the kingdom they were expecting with the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed, demonstrated, taught and illustrated.

REFLECT

Ponder on Father God's enduring heart of love for the Hebrew people.

Pray for their spiritual eyes to be opened to recognise Jesus as their Messiah. Pray for the Gentile part of Father God's family to honour and understand their spiritual roots.

WEEK 2: DAY 2 Father's love (2)

The reason the Jews expected Messiah to be a conquering king who would set up His earthly throne in Jerusalem was rooted in their belief and understanding of one of the great themes of Scripture: the Kingdom of God. Father God is not only the Lover of our soul He is also our King.

"Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages." Revelation 15:3

By definition, a king must have a kingdom; a realm or people over whom He reigns. We first catch a glimpse of this in the creation story [Genesis 1] where Father God rules sovereignly, in a general sense, over everything He created which He pronounced to be good. Genesis chapters 2-3 shows us God's intention to reign and rule as a loving benevolent King over humanity but because of our independence and rebellion that vehicle for God's Kingdom was lost forever. So, another way had to be found beyond Eden. Just a few chapters later we find the world had become so depraved and wicked that God resolved to destroy all but righteous Noah's family. This was a wonderful act of Father's enduring love and grace to us because He destined Noah to become the genetic building block for us all.

In Genesis 12 we read how Father God called one nomadic man, Abram, to follow Him, which he did obediently and faithfully. Again, as an act of grace and borne out of His enduring desire for a people who would serve Him and allow Him to rule over them as their King, God then did something amazing.

Read Genesis 15.

What is a covenant?

Who made the covenant with Abram? What do you think the significance of this might be?

Father God promised childless and rootless Abram multitudes of descendants and a homeland of their own. Genesis 16 relates the story of how Abram tried to make it happen himself. The result of

Hagar's pregnancy was Ishmael, the father of the Arabic peoples. Following his birth God changed his name to Abraham [meaning Father of many]. He would not only be the forebear of the Hebraic people but of many other nations too, through Ishmael. The covenant God made with him was then affirmed.

Why do you think Father God might have acted this way at this point?

In Genesis 18:10 we read how an angelic visitor prophesied to Abraham that within a year his wife Sarah, who was way past child-bearing age, would give birth to her own son. She laughed at the prospect but true enough within the year Isaac [ironically meaning laughter] was born. Through Isaac's descendants the blood-line of the Hebraic people is traced. The remainder of Genesis tells the story of how Abraham's family grew from one family into a whole nation and how they came to be living in slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt.

In Exodus we meet Moses; a Hebrew foundling brought up as a royal prince in Pharaoh's own palace. His people were greatly persecuted, abused and oppressed to such an extent that they cried and groaned to God to deliver them from Egypt and give them the land He had first promised to Abraham.

Read Exodus 3 and 4.

At the burning bush, ageing Moses had a powerfully personal experience with Father God. God again revealed His deep love for His people and, as yet another act of grace, called Moses to lead them not only out of slavery to Pharaoh but into a deeper relationship with Himself. Exodus 15 records the song of praise Moses sang to God just after their amazing deliverance at the Red Sea. In v.18 we read:

"The LORD will reign for ever and ever."

This is the first mention in Scripture of the Hebrews' understanding of God as their King and is better translated as simply 'The Lord reigns'.

Read Exodus 19:5-6.

Write down what you think Father God might be saying here.

Father God is clearly calling the nation descended from Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, into a very special and personal relationship. He says they are to be a set apart (holy) people for Him; a Kingdom (nation) of priests. This means that He alone was to be their King and no other. Although the phrase 'Kingdom of God' does not appear in Scripture until the New Testament, the concept of Israel as God's kingdom people is implicit throughout the Old Testament and has always been taught by the sages of Israel.

REFLECT

Reflect again on all you have learned today. Can you identify the root cause of today's problems in the Middle East? What do you think might be the consequences of this for modern Israel?

Spend some time reflecting on Lamentations 3:22-23 then praise Father God for His faithful enduring love to all of us, His people.

CHALLENGE

Keep speaking your Father God declaration out loud over your life every day.

WEEK 2: DAY 3 Father's love (3)

At Mount Sinai Father God was effectively betrothed to the Israelite people. He brought them out of slavery to Pharaoh to be set apart exclusively to Him. Moses is seen as the 'matchmaker' presenting the 'bride' to her husband, God.

Look at Exodus 19:5-8.

Which part of the betrothal ceremony do you think these words represent?

Think back... did God make any wedding vow?

In the remainder of chapter 19 Father God told His bride to prepare herself to come and meet Him up close, in the 'intimacy' of the mountain. The trumpets are a traditional part of a Jewish wedding that announce the imminent arrival of the bridegroom. But the people were terrified by the noise, smoke and fire and begged Moses to go up and meet God as their representative, which he did. Whilst he was there, Father God gave Moses the terms of the marriage contract – the 10 Commandments [moral and civil guidelines so that Israel could live as the kind of bride He intended her to be] – and the instructions for the tabernacle which represents the marital home where bride and groom would regularly meet together.

Read Exodus 32.

In marriage terms what had Israel done?

At first, God was grieved and angry but Moses pleaded for forgiveness and v.14 says '*The Lord relented*'. In chapter 34:5-8 we read how God came down powerfully and met intimately with Moses, again re-affirming over and over His faithful and enduring love for His chosen people. Truly Father God loves forever.

After a period of 40 years wandering in the desert, until the original rebellious group brought out of Egypt had died off, Father God eventually took His people into the long-Promised Land. Joshua led the people in successive victories but after his death Israel struggled to keep the land they had gained. The book of Judges depicts years of cyclical behaviour: the people sinned; God raised up a

leader [judge]; they repented and turned back to Him for a while; the people sinned, et.al. Eventually we read in Judges 17:6:

'In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.'

Father God's desire was always for Israel to subject themselves to Him as their King; it seems that without a human intermediary the people were incapable of following God for themselves. After the period of the judges Father raised up prophets to speak to the people on His behalf but, again, this did not satisfy them.

Read 1 Samuel 8:6-20.

Summarize what is being said.

We cannot say they were not warned! BUT because of His great love for them, Father God agreed to give them a human king to be their leader just like the other nations. Saul was a natural leader but failed because he was more of a people-pleaser than a God-pleaser. He did not follow God whole-heartedly. David was both a natural and a gifted leader; He was also totally determined, with a passionate heart of love, to be obedient to Father God. Whilst David reigned under God, the kingdom on earth prospered. Israel became so wealthy and powerful that when Solomon inherited on the death of His father David, he became king over the richest, most successful, powerful and blessed nation ever to have existed. But Solomon fell away; He married foreign wives with occult backgrounds and practises which seriously displeased Father God. From then onwards the kingdom began to crumble: Israel began to lose its wealth; David's sons fell out with each other with the result that the kingdom was divided. Eventually they were overrun by the Babylonians who firstly besieged Jerusalem, then ransacked it completely destroying Solomon's magnificent temple; they were then carried off into captivity in Babylon where, with hindsight, they mourned for what they had lost [see Psalm 137].

Despite the whole sad and sorry history Father God still loves His people forever. His love has certainly endured through much pain and rejection and deep in His Father heart God continued to search for a people who would love Him, and be obedient to Him, as their King. Much of what is written in the prophetic books of the Old Testament points to the next stage of Father God's awesome love and grace-fuelled plan.

Read Galatians 4:4.

What was the next stage of the plan?

REFLECT

Reflect on all you have learned today. In what ways has your perception of Father God grown?

Spend some time thanking and worshipping Father God that forever He loves and that He has, forever, loved you.

WEEK 2: DAY 4 Father's love (4)

At exactly the right time for the Jewish people, politically, socially, economically and spiritually, Father God sent His precious only Son, Jesus, into the world to 'save His people from their sins' [Matt.1:21]. Jesus' name in Hebrew is Yeshua. It derives from the verb 'to save' and means 'one who saves' or saviour. Jesus was the long-promised Messiah, Anointed One, who would be the physical agent of God's Kingdom on earth. Jesus came to reach His own people; in fact, through His radical re-interpretation and summarizing of the Torah [the Law], Jesus simplified the manner in which this could be achieved.

Read Matthew 22:37-40.

What was the key word that summarized the Old Testament teaching?

Father God loves His people forever; that is His faithfulness to the covenant vow He first made with Abraham. Jesus came to call the people to return to God; to love and obediently follow Him with the kind of all-consuming passion which meant He had top priority over everything; that He was their King. The rabbis taught that the extent of our love for our neighbour is an expression of the depth of our love for Father God. So, if we do not love our neighbour very much, we must have lukewarm hearts towards God! This is why Jesus linked the two together.

It was out of Father God's enduring love and desire to have a Kingdom people who would set themselves apart solely to Him that Jesus eventually underwent the Cross. What the blood of the Passover lamb did prophetically and symbolically to deliver the Hebrews from slavery to Pharaoh so that they might be set apart to God, Jesus did literally. He became the true Passover Lamb, the perfect never to be repeated final sacrifice for sin – but the Jews rejected their Messiah. This rejection was the catalyst for the next phase of Father's grace-filled love plan – the grafting in of the wild olive, the Gentile nations, in order that through seeing God's presence, favour and blessings on us we might be used to provoke them into fruitfulness. That shows the extent of Father's heart of love: He was even willing to set aside His own people in order that you and I might be saved.

REFLECT

Stop for a minute and reflect on the fact that it is only because Jesus' own people rejected Him that the gospel came to us.

How does that make you feel?

Read verse 1 again carefully. Write down the key word?

When we get married it is the coming together of two distinct individuals as one. Each one has their own ideas, goals, values, priorities, etc. Therefore, in order for the relationship to work, there are usually numerous, small adjustments both partners need to make in order for the marriage to be blessed. Father God has already done everything He needs to do to make our relationship with Him 'work'; which means we are the ones who need to make the adjustments. Over the next few weeks, we will do some in-depth work in these areas.

REFLECT

If you are married then reflect on your own marriage relationship. If you are single then reflect on your closest friendship. Begin to identify what type of areas in your life might need some attention in order to improve or make this relationship 'work' better e.g., priorities...

In the same way that we 'grow' into married life and relationships so we grow into the Kingdom of God. We gain access immediately through Jesus who is the Gateway into God's Kingdom but there follows a **process** of growth as we gradually allow Him to reign and rule, i.e., exercise His Kingly authority, over different aspects of our life.

REFLECT

Look again at the areas in your life identified above. Take the first area and ask the Holy Spirit to show you *how* you might begin to allow Father God to rule and reign as your King. Wait quietly as you give Him opportunity to speak back to you.

Worship and praise God today using songs. Try to push distracting thoughts aside and concentrate solely on Father God for ten minutes.

Reflect on all you have learned today; especially consider the word 'if' from Deuteronomy 28:1 and its consequences, good and bad.

WEEK 2: DAY 5 Father's love (5)

Jesus died to save *all* His people from their sins [Jews and Gentiles]; but He did not stay dead.

Read Matthew 28:6-7; Acts 1:3.

The power of God raised Jesus from the dead. His resurrection was the fulfilment of the Old Testament Feast of First Fruits [see Exodus 23:16-19] which is why Paul taught that Jesus' resurrection was the first fruits for all of us who trust to be raised from the dead into resurrection life [see 1 Corinthians 15:20-23].

Once raised, Jesus appeared to the disciples and continued to proclaim the message of God's Kingdom [Acts 1:3] before being taken up into heaven where He is perpetually worshipped, praised and glorified as the Lamb that was slain as the final sin offering.

Read Revelation 5:9-10.

Who are these verses referring to? Compare with 1 Peter 2:9.

It says that we, you and I and all the people of God, are a Kingdom [nation] of priests [worshippers, intercessors, ministers] who have been *chosen* to *reign* upon the earth for God. Does that make you feel very special to Father God? I hope so. The message of Father's plan for a Kingdom people did not end with Jesus' death; rather it began a new and greater dynamic through the resurrection, especially once He empowered His people by immersing them in the Holy Spirit [see Acts 2]. What in Jesus had been limited to one small geographical area was suddenly given the power to become a world-wide movement.

Read Romans 6 and 8:1-2.

Jesus' death broke the power of sin and death. Sin is still around and every day we are tempted in various ways to give in to it but we do not actually have to do so. In the same way that Jesus was raised from the dead, that same resurrection power and life pumps through our spiritual veins which means we actually have power NOT to sin; it is a daily, moment by moment choice whether to sin or not.

Read Ephesians 1:19-22 and 2:4-6.

What do you think the Ephesians verses mean?

This is one of the great blessings of being a child of God! We are not only forgiven, made dead to sin and alive to God; we are also seated with Jesus at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven *far above* every spiritual power and authority ever conceived by men, Satan or all the forces of darkness put together.

EXERCISE

Make a Bible or Internet search to discover what the significance of the position at Father God's 'right hand' might be?

What is the significance of this for you and me?

It has dual significance: we have the same intimate privileged access to Father God that the Prince of Wales has to the Queen of Great Britain; just as he is authorised to deputise for his mother we have been given the freedom, privilege and responsibility to *exercise* Father's authority in given situations and circumstances in order to see His Kingdom come and His will being done on the earth. When we believe the significance of our being seated with Jesus in heavenly places then we will also understand that *everything* on earth is below us; beneath our feet and therefore subject to us. We look down from the highest place in glory upon sicknesses, diseases, demons and all enemies of God's Kingdom. Everything quakes at the power of God's Word and authority applied through the believers BUT there is a big BUT!

Read John 5:19 and James 4:6-7.

We must never allow ourselves to forget this power and authority is God's. It is only because we are in Jesus it has been given to us to exercise as His regents. Authority and power in the hands of a fool can be devastating. We have been given these things not to use indiscriminately but only when given Father's go-ahead. This is why we must also use our right of privileged access. The closer we stay to Father's throne, the greater we will understand His heart and will. He shares His secrets with those who love Him, not so that we write them down in a book and forget them but so

that we DO something with them. As we stretch out our hand to heal, His Kingdom comes near; as we open our mouths to speak His Word, captives are set free, the hungry are fed, unjust situations are turned around and His Kingdom comes near.

Father God has always sought a people who will come to Him and enthrone Him as their King and be subject to His Kingship. He went first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. But His loving heart towards the Jews still endures. The fruitless fig tree [Matthew 21:19-21; 24:32] is a biblical metaphor of His people, but the tree is fruitless no longer. In the last 60 years hundreds of thousands of Hebrews have had their eyes opened to recognise Jesus as their Messiah. Scripture teaches that Jesus will come a second time. This coming will be very different from the first and Jesus will at last fulfil *all* the prophetic Messianic expectations: He will 'cast fire' as the nations of the world are judged and Israel's enemies crushed; He will establish His Kingdom of peace, righteousness and justice forever from Jerusalem and His Kingdom will encompass ALL the nations of the world. Ultimately the world itself will be restored [see Revelation 5:9-10-end]. When read in conjunction with Scripture, international events indicate this may well happen very soon but we are told not to concern ourselves with times and dates [Matthew 24:36]. Our focus must be on working to see Father God's righteous reign and rule established first in our lives, then through us into the situations and circumstances where He leads us.

REFLECT

Spend some time worshipping and praising Father God that He loves forever.

CHALLENGE

In the light of all you have learned today, identify one practical way in which you can do something to bring God's Kingdom near. Now go and do it.

WEEK 3: GROUP SESSION

MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS

Ever since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, God has been looking for a people who will allow Him to be their King.

Romans 11:26.

Who is this Israel?

Isaiah 61:1-2.

Israel's Messianic expectations of Jesus.

Luke 4:18-19.

What is the key aspect that is missing from what Jesus quoted?

What is the day of vengeance of our God.

Why do you think Jesus left this out?

The Kingdom Jesus came to proclaim, demonstrate, explain and illustrate was a matter of life, peace, joy and righteousness in the Holy Spirit. The day of vengeance, judgement, will happen at Messiah's Second Coming.

JESUS' 'GOSPEL' AND THE DYNAMICS OF HIS KINGDOM

Write down what you consider the gospel message to be.

Jesus came not only to die but to live an amazing life that successfully proclaimed, demonstrated, illustrated and explained the true nature and message of Father God's heart and Kingdom.

Matthew 4:17 and 23-24.

What was the good news of the Kingdom Jesus preached? To find out, look at some more scriptures.

Luke 6:5-19.

Luke 7:12-15.

Luke 8:27-36.

John 2:1-11.

In what ways did Jesus' 'gospel' message differs from what you wrote down earlier?

Because Jesus had not yet died, His message did not revolve solely around the Cross... The heart of Jesus' message was the present reality of the Kingdom of God. It was a dynamic power at work to change people's lives and it did exactly that.

What is Jesus teaching about the Kingdom of God in the following parables?

Matthew 13:31-33.

Matthew 13:44-46.

Matthew 11:12.

The word translated 'forcefully' means with something like centrifugal force. In other words, the Kingdom of God will be flung out to the extremities of the earth by a tremendously powerful, unstoppable force. This force is not armaments or holy war but love, humility and servanthood. This love is actually the Father's heart demonstrated through us to a hurting world.

WEEK 3: DAY 1 Jesus the King

Jesus lived a dynamic, Father-centred life, fully submitted, filled and directed by the Holy Spirit. Wherever He went the Kingdom of God broke out all around Him with mighty centrifugal-like force as He touched and changed lives. He did it all to the glory of His Father. Our goal is also to live totally for the glory of Father God in the power of the Holy Spirit, seeing His Kingdom break out through us to touch and change lives that, in turn, become agents for society transformation. In order for this to happen in a supernatural manner, not just in our own strength, God's Kingdom must first be formed in us. We must allow Him to be King. A seed takes many years to grow into a fruit-bearing tree, so it is with God's Kingdom in us. It is a process, so we need to be patient with ourselves. Right from the cradle we have learned by an in-built default to look out for number one so it takes time to put our own desires, wants and ingrained behavioural patterns to the back of the queue, to learn to walk by faith with Father God, and attend to what pleases His heart first.

Read Matthew 12:18.

How is Jesus described here?

What does a servant do?

Queen Elizabeth II was Head of State of the British Isles and the Commonwealth, boss of the 'firm' but also a wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother who loved dogs and horses and had, apparently, a great sense of humour! People related to her in each of these distinct roles but there was one over-riding factor: no-one ever forgot she was Queen. Even closest family members on encountering her for the first time that day had to address her as 'your Majesty' and bow or curtsey; only at subsequent meetings could they be more informal. In fact, all those involved in palace life, from the humblest to the greatest, were her servants. Everything revolved around what pleased her. This is the same in our relationship with Father God: we are His children and may know Him intimately as the lover of our soul and as a Father who has generously blessed us and made us heirs with Jesus of a great many spiritual blessings and freedoms but that closeness does not permit us to live life anyhow; even in the intimacy of a child-parent-lover relationship we must never forget to honour and reverence God as our King. If even Jesus was described as His servant, then how much more should we determine to learn how to live our lives in order to please our King, or Lord, and do His will? The Greek word 'Lord' literally means our owner.

Look up Galatians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

What do you think this might mean for your life?

We are not our own, we have been bought with a price. Jesus' death was the price Father God paid to bring us out of slavery to sin and to call us to Himself as His people.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:22-23 and Romans 6:18 and 22.

In Greek there are actually seven different words for 'servant'. Whenever the term carries the sense of being formally bound to another the word used is *doulos* which is commonly translated as 'bond slave'. A bond slave could be a slave who, having been set free, then *chooses of his or her own freewill* to remain living as a servant to his or her master.

In the light of this, write down what you think Paul might mean.

Father's costly love demands our costly response.

Read Deuteronomy 6:5.

REFLECT

What this verse might really mean to you.

In the box overleaf think carefully what 'heart', 'soul' and 'strength' represent in your life?

HEART	=	
SOUL	=	
STRENGTH	=	

In the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table each of the knights swore allegiance to the king. Although each one had his own individual 'quest' or 'assignment,' their oath of allegiance to put the king first always took priority over personal matters. We find a similar heart-allegiance in 1 Chronicles 12:38: the fighting men gathered at Hebron ...'determined to make David King'... Determined means 'single-minded', 'unwavering' and 'resolute' which means the business of making David king took top priority over everything; personal ambition, family and comfort. Father God is looking for a people who will determine to make Him King; those who will allow Him to reign in them and over them by making His Kingdom their priority. If we are going to turn the new beginning with God that this course represents into a close walk in the very dust of Jesus' feet, then we must consider what it might mean for us to do this.

REFLECT

Spend some time confessing to Father God how you have allowed other things to take priority over Him. Ask Him to show you how to start re-ordering your life to make His priorities yours too.

CHALLENGE

Memorize Deuteronomy 6:5.

WEEK 3: DAY 2 Repentance

It is very easy for us to make a heart-led emotional response to a deeper commitment to Father God; it is not so easy to follow it through until we are the type of singular-minded transparent vessels for the Kingdom that Jesus was.

Read Luke 11:28; John 14:15; 21, 23 and 24; 15:10; James 1:22-24; 1 John 2:5-6.

What is the key to true life in the Kingdom of God?

Compare Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18 and Mark 12:30-31.

What word has Jesus inserted when linking these two Scriptures?

Gentile Greek-thinking places heavy emphasis on the intellectual understanding of arguments and concepts, which is most likely why the word 'mind' or 'understanding' has been inserted. On the contrary, Hebraic thought is always practical. If we say we love God then we must go further than just understanding it in our mind; our lives must show it. It is that simple!!

The rabbis taught that the depth of our love for God is measured by how much love we give to our neighbour. This is most likely why Jesus linked these two verses in His summary of all Torah (the Law). If we love God and His Word but fail to love our neighbour then, in Hebraic terms, our life is a sham; we are not only showing ourselves to be double-minded and liars, we are also misrepresenting Father God to those who 'read' our lives on a daily basis. It might help us at this point if we examine briefly what repentance really is.

TRUE REPENTANCE

Read 1 John 1:9.

Repentance begins with confessing our sins to God. But this is much more than saying a quick 'sorry', expressing regret, responding to an altar call [even when accompanied by loud crying] or praying a salvation prayer. The Greek word for 'confess' (*homologeō*) means *to agree that what we did was really wrong*. Once this has been done, we then need to work out true repentance through

a real change somewhere in our life. The Hebrew word *t'shuvah* [turning or re-turning] when used in terms of belief always means turning *from* sin in order to *return to* God. This connects the word to a change of some sort, e.g., a change of heart, mind, purpose or conduct.

Read Hebrews 4:12.

What is it that 'judges the thoughts and attitudes of our heart?'

When God's Word brings conviction of sin that leads us to confession we must then make a commitment to go one step further and turn to God by changing our wrong behaviour. This is real repentance and requires Father's grace to follow through.

Read Luke 9:23-24.

What do you think Jesus is really saying here?

This comes back to where our heart-allegiance really lies. Self-denial is an unpopular concept in our self-obsessed, self-pleasing world. The other aspects of Jesus' minimalist life-style such as His widespread rejection, persecution, betrayal and death, do not readily appeal to our twenty-first century self-preservation instincts either. This is wonderfully summed up for us in the title of a Two Ronnies' mini-series: *Death Can Be Fatal!* And we do not like the thought of too much of what we have spent our life-time learning, achieving or striving to possess being dealt that kind of fatal blow. Ouch!

EXERCISE

Ask the Lord to show you just one area in your life where you are being 'double-minded'.

Confess your sin to Father God and identify what type of action you need to take to truly repent in that area.

Ask Father God to help and strengthen you in your resolve to be free of that sin.

N.B. If this is something very deeply rooted (an ingrained habit or behaviour pattern or addiction) then you may need practical support on a daily basis. You may feel guilty or ashamed but it will help

you enormously to share this with a close friend, small group leader, pastor or person discipling you. You will then be able to work out together a plan to help you overcome.

Father God is looking for our complete allegiance and obedience. Thankfully, He knows we are incapable of bringing every aspect of our lives under His control immediately; it is an unravelling process. But confession of sin is not enough. For God to truly reign and rule as King, our lives need to bring forth the *fruit* of repentance: our returning to Him with all our heart, soul and strength.

REFLECT

Re-read 1 John 1:9 Spend some time thanking and worshipping Father God for what He has done in your life regarding that sin you have just confessed.

WEEK 3: DAY 3 Believer's baptism

Believer's baptism is an ordinance or sacred ritual that has been part of the ministry of believers from the earliest days. It is an outward witness and sign of the inner commitment made to turn away from sin and turn to Father God.

Read Matthew 3:1-17.

The practice of baptism in water originates in Hebraic religious practice: to worship at the tabernacle or Temple a person had to be ceremonially clean [e.g., Exodus 30:20-21]. The grime and chores of everyday life meant ritual purity was easily lost but prior to worship it had to be restored again. This was done through ceremonial washing in a ritual bath or (when in Babylon) a river. The water is symbolic of the washing away of impurities. The Greek word translated 'baptise' means 'to dip, soak or immerse' into a liquid until what is immersed takes on the qualities of what it has been dipped in. E.g., cloth soaked in dye takes on the colour of the dye.

With this in mind, what do you think the water might represent to us?

Read Romans 6:3-14.

When we are baptised in water we are totally immersed in the water not only as a witness to those that watch that we have become followers of Jesus or even as a prophetic sign that our sins have been washed away but as a complete identification with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

Read Acts 2:38.

Most modern Bibles read '*Repent and be baptised... in the name of Jesus*'... In the Greek it reads '**into the name**'... This subtle difference may not seem very much to get bothered about but actually it represents a great deal in terms of truth. When someone is baptised, it is usually said by the one baptising: '*I baptise you IN THE NAME of...*' as if we had better baptise in Jesus' name rather than in our own name or the church's name. But this is not what it really means! Look back at Appendix 3 *God's Awesome Name*, there is something incredibly awesome about the NAME of God, be it Yahweh or Yeshua [Jesus]. When we are baptised INTO the name of Jesus we are being identified with everything that name signifies, i.e., **the fullness of the Godhead** expressed in Jesus. Therefore, in being baptised we are saying something like:

'I want to so take on the qualities of Jesus that nothing of the old me remains. The former me has died and been buried in the same way Jesus was. When something is truly dead it does not usually get up and live again. Therefore, I believe my old nature has gone forever. When I rise up out of this water it will be a new me; one who has all the supernatural power of the God-head living in me. This means I have the spiritual potential to live a totally transformed and transforming life for God's Kingdom day by day in the power of the Holy Spirit just like Jesus did'.

Baptism then is like swearing an oath of allegiance to the King. Therefore, water baptism is not to be taken lightly. Remember we need to follow through our verbal commitment to repentance by delivering the 'goods' of a changed and transformed life!

Read Matthew 3:15; Hebrews 4:15; Romans 3:23-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Why was Jesus baptised?

Baptism was clearly a priority for Jesus, although not because He needed to be ritually purified or ceremonially washed clean. Just as when we are baptised we identify with Him in His death and resurrection so, in His baptism, Jesus identified Himself with us and our need as humanity for forgiveness of sins and cleansing. It is at age 30 that a Jewish man is deemed to come into his full spiritual vigour. Luke 3:23 tells us this was the age Jesus was when He came to be baptised by John. It signifies a turning point in His life: from hidden preparation to public ministry; it is the same for us.

Read Matthew 3:16-17; Luke 3:21-22; Mark 1:9-11 and John 1:32-34.

What happened when Jesus was baptised?

Read Acts 2:38-39.

What is promised to those who are baptised?

If we are truly going to live the message and demonstrate the supernatural power of God's Kingdom then we need the empowering of God's Holy Spirit. Believer's baptism is therefore a key stage on our spiritual journey.

Read Acts 2:38-39 and 10:48.

What sort of instruction is this?

REFLECT

Think on all you have learned about believer's baptism. Read Acts 8:36. What is your answer to the question?

Talk to Father God about it and listen for His answer.

Very probably you may already have received believer's baptism but not had the sort of understanding you now have. If so then think...

In what ways has your understanding of believer's baptism and what it meant to you been enriched or challenged? Write down your thoughts...

WEEK 3: DAY 4 Heart allegiance

Write down the memory verse Deuteronomy 6:5.

If we are to become a serious disciple of Jesus then we must aim to truly give Father God first priority in our life just as He did. Having said that we must air a note of caution because somehow we must retain balance in our life and avoid extreme reactions: each of us has very real responsibilities, legitimate daily needs and calls on our time, e.g., spouse, children, parents, work, etc., which means that we need to find a way of living whole-heartedly for God whilst not neglecting these people or responsibilities. Therefore, in the light of the limitations and restrictions we each face living whole-heartedly for God may simply be to be the best mother, father, son, daughter, worker to His glory and the best of our ability.

The command of Deuteronomy 6:5 means we must aim to love Father God completely, with every single aspect of our being not just intellectually or by following a religious ritual; being a disciple affects the whole of who we are. The words 'heart, soul and strength' represent different aspects of our make-up. E.g., our soul is who we really are deep inside: what we think, our character, how we express ourselves to others and the choices we make. Strength has to do with our integrity, commitment, perseverance and vigour, which can be either inner or physical attributes.

In this verse what do you think the heart represents?

Although it can be used as a metaphor for many of our emotions (part of the inner soul), the heart is about far more than emotion; it is so important to our well-being that when it stops beating we die - FACT! This is true both physically and spiritually which is why we must pay very careful attention to the state of our heart.

The heart is above all else the place where we give and receive love. God designed us in the beginning to love and serve Him more than anyone or anything else. He is meant to be our number one!

Read Psalm 111:7-8; 112:6-8; 57:7; 108:1.

Father God's heart towards us is steadfast [loyal, faithful, trustworthy, devoted, unswerving and committed]. When our heart is also steadfast towards Him then our heart is healthy; we are secure and have no fears, in fact we can even sing to God in the midst of trials. Amazing!

Read Genesis 6:5-6; Psalm 86:11.

When we fall in love we subconsciously give away part of our heart to another. Our heart is divided, which is why it hurts so much when that person withdraws their love; it leaves a wound behind. We want people to love us steadfastly but we must also consider the wounds we may have caused Father God when we have not loved Him as wholeheartedly as we ourselves hope to be loved.

Read Exodus 20:1-6.

What is an idol?

REFLECT

Think for a few minutes.... Are there any idols in your life?

In the western world we may not prostrate ourselves in blatant idol worship but nevertheless we all give bits of our heart away to people or things we allow to be more important to us than Father God. The list below includes some very common 'idols'. Read through it slowly. None of these things is out-and-out wrong BUT if we allow them to be more important to us than God then they become sinful. When we recall how much our idolatry pains Father's heart we have no option other than to identify these things, confess them and commit to work out our repentance by re-structuring our priorities.

EXERCISE

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you which of the following are idols in your heart.

Family [spouse, partner, children and/or parents]	Money or financial security	Job
Having 'things' e.g., a nice house, car, caravan, boat, holidays, antiques etc.	Food [including chocolate]	Alcohol, tobacco or drugs

Personal ambition or life goals	Shopping	Having 'toys' e.g., the latest phone, I-Pod, computer, tablet etc.
Your birthday	Christmas [festivities, food, presents, etc.]	Appearance [image, clothes, figure, weight, hair, make-up etc.]
Media [computers, TV, DVD, films, cinema etc.]	Celebrities	Music
Sport or keeping fit	Having a title or position; being seen by others to be important	Having fun, personal pleasure [concerts etc.]
Recreation	Friends	Busyness and activity
Academic achievements; intelligence & knowledge	Being first, right or in control	Popularity; being liked by others
Your 'ministry'	Church	

EXERCISE

Is there something in your heart that is not on the list?

Once you are sure your list is complete pray the following prayer out loud to Father God for the first thing you have ticked. Repeat it again for each further item.

Father God I confess that I have sinned by giving away to [name the appropriate thing(s) in the box you have ticked] ***that part of my heart-love that should belong to You. I repent and give that part of my heart back to You. Holy Spirit please help me re-order my priorities to keep*** [name the appropriate thing(s) in the box you have ticked] ***in its proper place from now on.***

REFLECT

Worship and thank Father God for His steadfast love towards you. Listen to the track *The Father Who Delights in You*. Open your heart to receive His love afresh. Ask Him to give you an undivided heart.

WEEK 3: DAY 5 Re-ordering priorities and values

Have you ever wondered how you came to have so many idols in your life? Although it is not an excuse, the answer lies in the Garden of Eden.

Read Genesis 3:1-5.

What was the serpent's temptation?

Adam and Eve fell for Satan's temptation easily enough and we fall for it too. It is instinctive for us to want to be in control of our own destiny, to exercise some power over our choices and basically put us, ME, first. This sin is called 'rebellion against God' and is rooted in our personal pride. Because we believe we know what is best for us our pride swerves us to try to rely on ourselves, our own instincts or the world's voice - ANYTHING other than God! Behind this is a hidden agenda buried deep within our psyche to search for meaning and significance, security and acceptance; the very things Father God provided for Adam and Eve in the Garden but which were lost because of their rebellion. The whole thing is about ME being number one; MY needs and MY wants are more important than God's or anyone else's.

EXERCISE

Look back to yesterday's list; identify how many of the idols are about putting YOU first in some way. Transfer them to the grid in Appendix 6 *Greek Thinking*.

The grid represents the Greek way of thinking we have inherited from our ancestors. The Greeks and Romans worshipped literally thousands of idols but the purpose behind it was ultimately selfish and superstitious, e.g., *if I make an offering to you, god of farming, then please bless my crops, etc.* Subconsciously all our idols are there to 'bless' us in some way. Sometimes we even pray and try and appease God in similar ways to the Greeks. This is all very different from the Hebraic understanding of Father God and His way of inter-relating personally with us.

Read Deuteronomy 28 and 1 Samuel 15:22.

What is the key to being blessed by God?

This is not appeasement and is done entirely to bless and serve Father God out of pure love, not love for ourselves; therefore, it is also the complete opposite of rebellion and pride.

When we think like the Greeks it is also easy to compartmentalise God; we might consign our faith to a God-labelled 'box' Monday-Saturday, only opening the lid to let Him out on a Sunday. When we do this, because our relationship with God is not well-developed, then we are more likely to fall into the Greek way of praying too. Father God needs to be much more than just another 'box' that must compete for our allegiance with other things. This way of living is not the way Father meant it to be for His children.

Underlying each one of the idols we have identified is a set of values we have absorbed either from our family, peers, community, religion or even the media.

EXERCISE

Work through the *Identifying My Values Exercise* in Appendix 7.

When you have done this consider the following:

- ▶▶ For the five main idols and values ask yourself seriously *why* is this thing so important to me?

Could you be using it as a God-substitute to meet your own inner need for significance, security or acceptance?

By now you should know that you are truly significant to Father God; so significant that He sent Jesus to die in your place and take the punishment for your rebellion and He has a special plan and purpose for your life. You are totally accepted by Father God just the way you are; He does not condemn you for anything you have ever said or done, He simply loves you and therefore you are totally secure in His arms of love.

Read Romans 8:28-39.

As precious privileged children of the King we no longer need to search for our significance, security or acceptance in any person or thing other than Him which means we *no longer need* the idols or God-substitutes anymore! It is time to get rid of them, something we need to do in order to work out the fruit of our repentance. Hebraic thinking places Father God at the centre of all of life and to understand this visually it is better not to draw up a list at all but to draw instead a set of concentric circles with God at the centre.

EXERCISE

Transpose the various key 'boxes' from Appendix 6 *Greek Thinking* into the concentric circles in Appendix 8 *Hebraic Thinking*. Those nearest to the centre are the most important. When looked at this way do some lose their importance or even disappear altogether?

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Exodus 20:3-5.

How many Gods are there? How are we to love Him?

There is only one true God who is actually jealous for our devotion. Father God means to be King of our life but there will not be any room on the 'throne' of our heart if our true allegiance has already been given away to things designed to serve us and we ourselves are firmly sat in pride of place on the throne. We must step aside and allow Him to take the HIGHEST place but because we naturally swerve towards Greek-thinking idolatry we have to work patiently and systematically over time at learning how to both please God and re-prioritise Him at the centre of our life.

REFLECT

Spend time talking to Father God about your priorities and values.

Thank Father for making you significant, secure and accepted in Him.

