

God loves us as a good father loves his sons and daughters, imparting life, providing and protecting with profound wisdom and neverfailing kindness. God pursues people as if they were long-lost children, yearning to adopt them as His own. Even though His father love is boundless and perfect, it's hard for most people to see or trust the fatherly love of God. Why? No matter how wonderful our human parents were, their love is at best a disappointment. For many, the most fearsome and hateful person imaginable is their father. It is not good news to them that God desires to be their Father. No matter how warped or wonderful the figure of a father may be in the heart of those for whom you are praying, learn how to pray for the Spirit of God to reveal to them the beauty and power of God as Father.

Romans 8:14-16

¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.

1. That the Spirit would testify with their spirit (vs 16)

Nothing hinders the Spirit of God from communicating at the deepest spiritual level with people, even those who have not yet become His children by faith. As you pray for people who have yet to follow Christ, pray that they would be awakened to the persuasive voice of God's Spirit. Pray that the Spirit would persuade them of the trustworthiness and goodness of God as Father.

2. That the Spirit would replace the spirit of slavery (vs 15)

Fear drives people away from God. Pray that the Spirit would expose the false fear that God wants to entrap them to tiresome religious servitude. Many are convinced that God seeks to condemn and punish them. Only God's Spirit can expose such spiritual terrorism and liberate them from such spiritual slavery. Pray that God would overwhelm the spirit of slavery by imparting the Spirit of adoption. Take time to imagine all that the Spirit of adoption communicates.

3. That the Spirit would reveal the Father (vs 15)

Pray that they would know to the core of their soul: that God has long desired them; that He loves them as they are; that He forgives them of their past; that He has dreamed of a marvelous future for them; that He smiles with favor at every attempt they make to obey Him; that their adoption is permanent, an unbreakable everlasting covenant; that He has purposed that they will become like Him, and that of all the persons they have known, He is the most delightful to know and the easiest person to please. Pray that the Spirit of adoption would cause them to look up into God's face, and recognize Him as the spiritual Father their heart has always yearned to know. Pray that they would actually cry out by the life and power of the Spirit, in new-given spiritual life.

4. That the Spirit would lead them (vs 14)

Pray for more than awareness of God's Father heart. Pray that they would actually follow God by the Spirit's doing. It's not easy to suddenly entrust one's life to any authority figure. The Spirit helps people obey God, leading them in a new life of belonging and following God as a beloved child.

Remind participants that the focus is upon praying for people who have yet to follow Christ in biblical, creative, and persistent ways.

1. Open by considering God's ways (ten minutes)

Open your time of prayer with a short discussion of scripture to help you form prayers that have the clarity, simplicity and power of expressing the truth and purpose of God as revealed in scripture.

- **Consider the ways of God's Spirit.** When does God's Spirit begin to work in people's lives? Because we have often focused on the way the Spirit of God fills believers, we can too easily ignore the marvelous work of the Spirit in the lives of people who have yet to follow Christ. We're going to pray from a passage that speaks to Christians, but we'll see that it powerfully portrays the worst of spiritual slavery and the very best of spiritual life in Christ. Read Romans 8:14-16, giving particular attention to the things that the Spirit of God does (He leads, testifies to our spirits who we are, and helps us recognize God as our spiritual Father).
- **Consider the difficulty of seeing the beauty of God's fatherly heart.** The most powerful reality of the gospel can be the most difficult to accept. That reality is the father-heart of God. Many people carry profound fears and confusion concerning father figures. All the more crucial to pray that God's Spirit would break the spirit of slavery and attest to the glory of God as Father.

2. Pray in a few "rounds" of prayer (five minutes each)

If you have a group of eight or more, you can divide them into small groups so that more people can pray at once. If you do so, keep prompting and guiding the small groups from time to time.

- **Praise the Father.** Perhaps the best way to begin your prayers is to praise the Father God for loving them all the years of their lives. No matter how rebellious they have been toward Him, the Father God has never abandoned them or wavered from His steadfast love. Praise Him explicitly for this long story of His pursuing love. Ask that the Spirit would reveal some of that Fatherly love.
- **That the Spirit would testify to their spirits.** The word for "testifies" is strong, courtroom language. Pray that God would attest in such persuasive ways that the words of the gospel message would resonate with their mind, heart, and soul.
- **That the Spirit of adoption would replace the spirit of slavery and fear.** Pray that the horror of spiritual terrorism would be lifted, replaced by the amazing Spirit of adoption.
- **That the Spirit would reveal the Father.** Pray that the Spirit reveals the Father as approachable, kind, good and wise. Pray that they actually would encounter the Father and trust His incredible love.
- **That the Spirit would lead them.** Verse 14, as does all of Romans 8, refers to the work of God's Spirit in believers. But certainly God's Spirit leads before anyone takes their first step of following God. So pray for that initial leading of the Spirit. Pray for a lifetime of joy as God's son or daughter.