

Embrace This Friend Who Sticks Closer Than a Brother

One recent morning as I was walking to my car in my driveway, I sensed that familiar voice speaking to me—the voice of the Holy Spirit. The words triggered a big smile on my face. He said to me, “Lee, I get a big kick out of you!” For the next 10 minutes in my car, I praised Him for showing me, yet again, His overwhelming love.

I can already hear some people gnashing their religious teeth over this comment and saying, “You just made that up!” But I know my Father’s love, and His acceptance has transformed me. I’m eager to grow more intimate with Him, and it is the Holy Spirit’s presence that helps me know Him better.

Many Christians struggle to know God as an affectionate, approachable and even playful Daddy. They read the Bible, listen to sermons and attend church, and they can quote Scriptures about God’s love. But for them, God’s love is a cold, clinical doctrine, not a warm experience. If you want to go deeper in intimacy with your Father, consider taking these steps:

First, you must discover your identity as a child of God. I’ve met a few people who don’t know who their father is. But I meet Christians all the time who doubt God loves them as a Father.

The Bible tells us that when we are born again, the Holy Spirit enters our hearts to solve our own paternity mystery. Romans 8:15 says, “You have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’” The Holy Spirit helps us understand whom we belong to. And His name is *Abba*—the Hebrew word for “Daddy” or “Papa.”

Second, you must throw out all old religious mindsets. Are you

uncomfortable calling God your “Daddy”? If you are, then you don’t really believe Romans 8:15. He is *Abba*! The problem is that many Christians have been conditioned by harsh sermons, rote prayers and somber organ music to believe God is (1) very distant, (2) always angry and (3) too busy managing heaven to take notice of us. That’s how the legalistic Pharisees viewed God, but Jesus challenged their warped ideas.

Throughout His life here, Jesus showed us that God is approachable, accepting of all people, friendly toward sinners, forgiving, protective and affectionate. He even let the disciple John lay his head on His chest (John 13:23), something a proper Pharisee would never do! Yet Jesus isn’t the slightest bit religious.

If you let Him, He will pull you close to His chest and let you hear the beating of His heart. He really wants you to be close!

Third, you must accept the forgiveness you’ve already been given. Some Christians can quote every Bible verse about God’s forgiveness, yet what they believe in their heads has never shifted to their hearts. Deep down they think God simply tolerates them. They know the blood of Jesus paid for their sins, but this seems more like a legal transaction ratified by a benevolent judge. They still believe God is silently mad at them, even though He canceled their guilty sentence. That is not the gospel!

God did not halfheartedly or reluctantly forgive you. He forgave you from His gushing heart of love.

Fourth, you must bring your hidden shame out of the closet. You can receive Christ’s forgiveness the moment you confess your sins (1 John 1:9). But James 5:16 says you can go further: you can also confess your secret sins to another person “so that you may be healed.” Many Christians have never taken this bold step because it’s too embarrassing. But the

more transparent you are with others, the freer you will be from your past.

If the devil is constantly reminding you of your past sins, grab another Christian and pray together about these accusations. I guarantee your accuser will flee.

Finally, you must be healed from your own issues with your parents. When some people hear the word *father*, it conjures up painful memories of domestic abuse, abandonment, alcoholism, or frightening punishments. Others associate *father* with a numb detachment because they never connected emotionally with their dads. These are called “father wounds”—and there is a maternal version too. Don’t let the mistakes of your imperfect parents keep you from enjoying God’s perfect love.

Talk to a pastor, mentor or counselor about your pain. Then let the Holy Spirit show you that your heavenly Daddy is strong, compassionate, accepting, gentle, kind, and faithful.
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*The preceding is an excerpt from **J. Lee Grady’s** book, Set My Heart on Fire (Charisma House, 2016). Copyright © 2016 by J. Lee Grady. All rights reserved.*

J. Lee Grady was editor of Charisma for 11 years before he launched into full-time ministry in 2010. Today he directs The Mordecai Project, a Christian charitable organization that is taking the healing of Jesus to women and girls who suffer abuse and cultural oppression. Author of several books including 10 Lies the Church Tells Women, he has just released his newest book, Set My Heart on Fire, from Charisma House. You can follow him on Twitter at @leegrady or go to his website, .