



ABBA

There's a lot of great drama at the airport. I like to go there just to watch the people who are waiting and the ones who are arriving to see if I can read their stories.

One recent Christmastime we were waiting at the airport for some very dear family members to arrive. As we waited, I watched a family, a mother and three children, waiting too. The oldest was a boy who looked to be about ten or so, then another boy, maybe seven or eight, and a little blonde-haired girl still in diapers and sucking on a pacifier. Great anticipation was obvious on all their faces.

A small swell of people immersed from the gate, and then another. At the beginning of the third surge, the one they were waiting

for arrived at last. He was dressed in military fatigues and was shouldering a duffle bag. From the looks of things, he had been overseas for a long time.

As soon as he cleared the security checkpoint, he dropped his duffle bag, knelt down, and opened his arms. The three happy children ran into them. Daddy had come home.

The same name those children called their father, *Daddy*, is the English version of the word *Abba*.

Abba receives its first introduction to the Bible from Jesus himself. In Aramaic, the Hebrew dialect that Jesus spoke, the word indicated an intimate relationship between father and child. Some commentaries stress that slaves were forbidden to address the head of the family by this title. It was reserved only for natural-born or adopted children.

As Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane right before His crucifixion, He was heard calling to God, “Abba.”

“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will”
(*Mark 14:36*).

Paul picks up on this reference to God as coined by His only natural-born Son.

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children (*Romans 8:14-16*).

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father” (*Galatians 4:6*).

Because we are God’s children, through adoption after our salvation, we have the right to call our Heavenly Father, the Creator of the universe, *Abba*.

Steve Fry¹ captures the beauty of the phrase in his song entitled “Abba Father”²

*Abba Father, Abba Father
Deep within my soul I cry.
Abba Father, Abba Father,
I will never cease to love You.*

Fry writes,

I had the privilege of being a youth pastor for over nine years. As a matter of fact, I started rather young—17, to be exact. Working with my peers was especially rewarding during those days, because the Jesus movement had a full head of steam. Soon, hundreds of young people were in our youth group.

Culture then—as now—was rapidly changing. The majority of teenagers in our youth group came from difficult family backgrounds. They were looking for ways to understand God that would help them connect to Him.

In a pursuit of understanding God better, we began to explore what the idea of His role Father meant. In particular, we looked at that passage in Romans 8 that says that we have received the spirit of sonship whereby we can cry, “Abba Father.” In studying this, I was struck by the fact that to say “Abba Father” in our day would be to say something like “Papa God.”

This revelation, at least to me, did not suggest casual flippancy or an inappropriate chumminess with the Lord; rather, it suggested a depth of intimacy that I had not known before.

It was during this season in which Abba Father was making himself real to me that I decided to go alone into our church sanctuary very late at night to worship. I sat down at the big Baldwin grand piano—I think it must’ve been close to midnight—and began to pour out my adoration before the Lord in spontaneous worship. This little chorus was birthed within five minutes as I sat there worshiping God. It perhaps was one of the quickest downloads from heaven I ever received as a songwriter! It captured in a moment the heart of a young man still in his teens whose chief aim in life was to know God.

The song “Abba Father” is about capturing the full-faced innocence that we as God’s children can have with Him. It is as if He is giving us permission to come as His little ones, crawl upon His lap, and embrace Him with the tender words “Papa God.” Such an approach is not disrespectful or inappropriately familiar. It is a term that suggests a depth of intimacy and trust that we as believers can know and have with God.³