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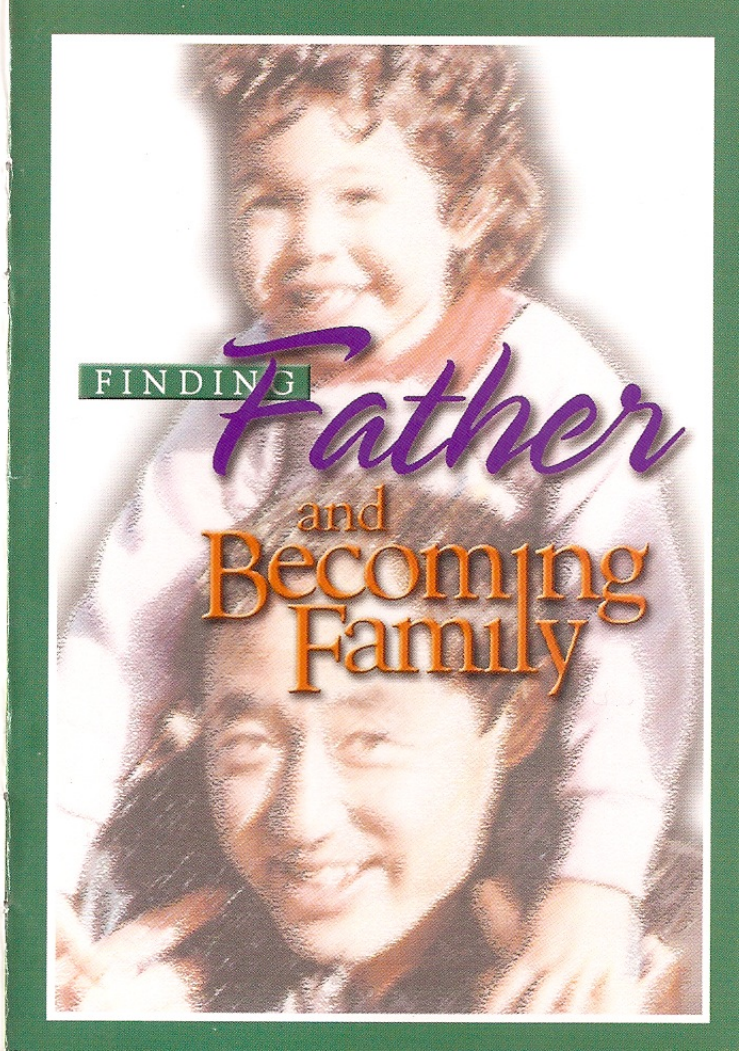

Note to the Reader

This booklet will give you a short summary of the Bible and some steps toward developing a loving relationship with God.

When you think of God, what comes to mind? Creator? Higher power? Supreme being? Almighty? Throughout the Bible, God is referred to in many ways, but "*Father*" appears to be the closest to his heart. When the followers of Jesus Christ asked him to teach them how to pray, he starts by telling them to address God as "*Our Father in heaven . . . .*" In his own prayers and as part of his everyday conversations, Jesus referred to God as "*my Father*"—even "Dad"—and himself as the Son of God. As Jesus was dying on a cross, his last words were, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*" So, if you really want to understand who God is, who Jesus is, and who we are meant to be, just think of a loving family—the Bible is a family story. That is why this booklet is entitled *Finding Father and Becoming Family*.

Hope you enjoy this booklet and find it meaningful!

God is everywhere, knows everything, and has the power to do anything. He made all there is and every person who has ever lived. God is awesome and infinite. He is the Creator—Master of the Universe and Beyond. Yet, he wants to be our loving Father—our spiritual Dad.

One Big Happy Family

We can see God's fingerprints on everything he created—fish, animals and insects; mountains, oceans, sky and space. Evidence of a Mastermind is everywhere. But, nothing proves God's existence more than we do. We humans were created to be like a mirror. When God looked at us, he expected to see a reflection of himself. We were supposed to think, feel and relate with others just as he did. We were to live godly lives. And, as long as we stayed close to God, we were like him—god-like.

That's the way it was in the beginning. We were like God because he was our spiritual Dad and we were his earthly kids. We were family. We totally loved and trusted God and each other. We were happy and God was happy too. We enjoyed nothing better than just being together.

Family Split

Then we humans messed it all up. We were fooled into thinking God was trying to keep us from being able to reflect him and be god-like. So we failed to trust him and tried to become like God on our own. As a result, we broke our relationship with him and died spiritually, leaving a vacuum within us. No longer able to reflect God, we became a blank and shattered mirror. And worse, we broke our heavenly Father's heart.

We became orphans—no longer able to know and love God and others the way we were meant to. We began fighting and even killing each other. We started polluting and trashing the world. We began destroying ourselves—becoming addicted to whatever falsely promised to fill the emptiness within us. Yet, the Father continued to love and care for us anyway.

Drastic Measure

As time passed, it became harder and harder for us to recognize that God was still around—doing things for us and trying to connect with us. He appeared increasingly fuzzy and far away until he became just a blurry concept. It finally reached a point where the Father felt he needed to do something drastic to show us exactly who he was and to help us realize that he still loved us. So, He decided to send someone in human form—someone like himself on the inside—not only to teach us, but also to show us what he was really like. He sent his Son from heaven to relate to us at our level. He sent Jesus.

Like Father Like Son

Just like his Father, Jesus loved everyone. He not only loved his Father more than his own life, he loved others that way too. He was a friend to everybody, even people no one else would be caught dead with—sick people, old people, mean and nasty people. He healed, fed and forgave them, whether they liked him or not—even if they wanted to kill him. He wasn't afraid of anyone and he corrected people if they were wrong. Hypocritical religious leaders upset him the most. He called them "white-washed tombs"—neat and clean on the outside, but dead and dirty on the inside.

Yet, he was funny and playful. He told jokes. Kids climbed all over him. He had a soft heart. When one of his closest friends died, he wasn't embarrassed to cry. But he wasn't a wimp. When people swore at him, beat and spit on him, made fun of him—

even when he was dying—he was calm, silently endured, and cared only for others.

Jesus taught everyone about his Father. It didn't matter who they were. He wanted everybody to get to know his Dad—old and young, male and female, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, religious and not religious. He amazed everyone with all he knew, even religious and political leaders—his insight into things and his wisdom were off the charts. And, he walked his talk. He was humble. He didn't force what he believed on anyone. Instead, he encouraged and helped people discover for themselves the truth behind what he taught and who he was. He won their trust and confidence.

That's what Jesus was like. And, Jesus came to show us what his Father was like. In other words, if you learned what Jesus was like, you also learned what the Father was like. The Son especially wanted us to

know how much his Father loved us and still loves us today. So, if Jesus and his Father are just alike, the picture many of us have of God must change. Rather than distant and judgmental, God is loving, forgiving and intimate.

Angry Mob

But, when Jesus came, what did we humans do to him? We executed him like a criminal, even though he didn't do anything wrong.

A lot of religious leaders were jealous and felt threatened because Jesus was so popular. Huge crowds followed Jesus everywhere. He could hardly get away from them, even to eat or sleep. Many people wanted Jesus to be their king and free them from Roman rule. The religious leaders didn't believe what Jesus was teaching and were afraid they were losing their power over the

people, so they tried to trick Jesus into doing or saying something wrong or against the law. In that way, they might be able to turn the people against him or get him thrown into jail by the Roman government.

Over and over again, their devious plans failed. Jesus could not be fooled. He was too smart for them. But, their persistence finally paid off. They succeeded in turning the people against him. The crowds yelled and screamed for the Roman governor, who had the power to execute people, to put Jesus to death. Although the governor didn't find Jesus guilty of anything, he was afraid of losing his power, so he gave in to them. He had Jesus executed by nailing him to a cross—the death sentence reserved for the worst criminals.

Giant Exclamation Point

Others killed Jesus, but not against his will. He was the Son of God with the power to come down from that cross. But, he didn't. He chose to suffer and die. Why? Because Jesus wanted us to realize how much he loved us by the pain he was willing to endure in order to bring us back into a relationship with his Father.

But, Jesus didn't suffer alone. His Father suffered too, as he silently watched his Son die. He also could have stopped Jesus' agony at any time. After all, he was God—he could do anything. But he didn't. Just as Jesus' body was being torn up while on that cross—the hearts of both Father and Son were also being ripped apart. God loved us so much that he was willing, not only to suffer himself, but also to let his Son suffer and even die if it meant there was a chance we would become his earthly children again.

Jesus died quietly, but his death on the cross was and is a giant exclamation point ending the Father's agonizing plea—spoken through Jesus' life and execution—"Can't you see how much I love you! Please come back to me!"

Trading Places

We should have been the ones willing to do whatever it took, even suffer and die, to convince God we were sorry for the mess we made and that we love him enough to be accepted back by him. We are the ones who should have been doing the pleading. But, it's the other way around. It was the Father and Son who tried—by any extreme means necessary—to convince us of their love and desire to forgive us and embrace us as members of their family once more.

Forever Family Again

But Jesus' death wasn't the end of his impact on human history. It was a new beginning. Even today, the cross is a symbol of hope around the world. Why? Because of what Jesus' death on that cross made possible for everyone—then as well as now.

Jesus didn't stay dead. He came back to life. He showed up all over the place—walking, talking and eating with all kinds of people. Then he rose up into the clouds and went back to heaven. After that, he sent back his Spirit so those of us who believe in him could have his power inside of us—to change and learn how to live life with our heavenly Father and each other the way we did in the beginning.

As a result, the very Spirit that was inside of Jesus can now fill the emptiness in our lives. We can be whole and complete. We can be God's mirror once again. When

others see us, they will see the Father—because we are becoming more and more like Jesus every day. And, we can be members of the heavenly Father's family again—forever. God will be our spiritual Father, we will be his earthly children, and Jesus will be our heavenly big brother. No other family could or ever will be more loving, secure or permanent.

Up to Us

All this is to say, the heavenly Father's heart aches for us to return to him—but he will never force us. Each of us has to decide for ourselves whether or not we want to love him in return and become his child again. If we desire to do so, all we have to do is truly feel sorry for the damage we've done—to God, ourselves and the world he created; believe in and be grateful for what the Father and Son were willing to suffer

for us; and accept God's invitation to return to him by fully giving ourselves back to him. If we sincerely do just these three things, it's done. We are then forgiven and in relationship with the Father once again. God asks for nothing else. Is that incredible or what?

Then . . .

Jesus' prayer for us will be fulfilled:

Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

And . . .

what Jesus said of himself will be proven true:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me.

STEPS toward
Finding Father and Becoming Family

What now? Here are some practical steps you can take if you want to fully experience the intimacy of the heavenly Father's family.

Be patient with yourself and God. As you take steps toward him, he will draw closer to you. He wants to have a deep and loving relationship with you.

1. **Learn**

   Learn about Jesus by reading the Bible. The Bible has two major sections: Old and New Testament. There are four historical accounts of Jesus' life at the beginning of the New Testament. Each is known by its author's name: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Learn about Jesus from those who know him. You can speed up the development of your own relationship with God by asking Christians how Jesus has changed them and how he relates to them in their daily lives.

2. **Examine**

Examine Jesus' life. Jesus said, *"I am the visible likeness of the invisible God"* and *"If you have seen me, you have seen the Father."* How do you feel about God if he is like Jesus?

Examine your life. The Bible tells us, we were created in the *"image of God."* In other words, we were created to be like Jesus—to relate to God and one another as Jesus did. How much like Jesus are you? Is Jesus someone you want to be like?

3. **Share**

Sharing your thoughts and feelings with God is called *prayer*. It makes him happy when you express yourself to him. Be open and honest with him and he will respond.

4. **Be embraced**

If you are sorry for not being all you were intended to be and regret not having a close relationship with God, express your innermost thoughts and feelings to the heavenly Father and he will forgive and embrace you. Forgiving and embracing you when you don't deserve it is called *grace*. All you have to do is accept it as a free gift of love.

5. **Become Family**

When you are forgiven by God, Jesus' Spirit will come into your life and you become a newborn child in the heavenly Father's family. Now, get ready for the most exciting adventure of your life!

Help

If you have found this booklet meaningful, please let me know. Also, contact me if there is any other way I might be of help to you in your search for God.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

Phone _____

e-mail _____

Invitation

I would also like to invite you to come with me to my church. I would be happy to introduce you to others who are at a similar stage in their relationship with God. Call or write so we can make arrangements, or just come.

Church Name _____

Address _____

_____

Phone _____

e-mail _____

website _____