

Experiencing the Comfort  
of Abba's Love

# I Am His

Rita J. Platt

NAVPRESS 



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For Dad

Abba's love is overwhelming.

He healed my heart and then gave you back to me.

Rejoicing in song with you is a gift I'll always treasure.

*Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty.*

— MOTHER TERESA

Also by Rita J. Platt:

*Step into the Waters*

*An Undivided Heart*

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# Abba Father

As we embark on our journey to a place brimming with eternal belonging, I'd like to share a portion of what set me on the path to becoming Abba's precious little girl.

There was a time when I had an earthly daddy who thought I was special, or so it seemed. I remember a time when I misbehaved and my dad and I shared a delightful conspiracy. He was supposed to spank me, but he didn't have the heart to follow through, so he took me over his knee and smacked his hands together loudly. My part was to yell as if I were really being spanked. I grinned like a Cheshire cat, and in my head a little singsong voice said, "Ha-ha, Mom! I'm Daddy's little girl, the apple of his eye."

Then it happened: My world fell apart. I was playing in our apartment when I noticed my dad getting ready to go somewhere. He looked a little uncomfortable, but at the time I thought nothing of it. It seemed like he felt the need to tell me where he was going, and he said, "I'm going to the store to get ice cream." I've always wondered if he ever bought any ice cream that day. I guess it doesn't really matter. What mattered was that he never came home. My daddy was gone! Why, why was he gone?

Later that same evening, my mom discovered a note on her dresser saying that Dad was leaving us. Sobbing and nearly hysterical, she

bundled my brothers and me into the car, and we drove around frantically searching for him. Frightened, we all leaned forward and peered out the car windows, straining to see something that would help us find him and make him come home. If we just could have found him, maybe I could have convinced him to come home. I would have behaved better. I would have done just about anything to put things back the way they were. I wanted to yell out, “I love you, Daddy. Please don’t leave me!” but I never got my chance to say those words to him. We couldn’t find him.

Dazed and feeling helplessly lost and alone, I didn’t know what to do or think. As far as I knew, my parents rarely fought. I remembered only one fight. My dad and mom were in the same room but miles away from each other. He sat in a recliner with bloodshot eyes, and my mom sat in a rocking chair crying. I remembered climbing into my mom’s lap and being held while she cried. Later I learned that the fight had something to do with my dad being drunk, coming home in the wee hours of the morning, and throwing up all over the front yard. I didn’t know then that this scene was a shadow of what was really happening in my dad’s life, that he was an alcoholic leading a secret life.

I racked my brain trying to figure out what was happening to us. Questions attacked me, demanding answers. Questions like “Why would he leave us? How could he lie to me like that? What did I do wrong?” I thought, *This can’t be real. This is not happening, not to me, not to Daddy’s little girl.*

About a week later, my dad came to visit us, but he didn’t come alone. We walked outside to meet him and then we saw her: a woman with bright pink lipstick and her son and daughter. Dad introduced us as though it were all completely normal. Did he really expect us to say, “Oh, how wonderful to meet you”? Yet I cooperated and went along, an eleven-year-old already faceless, wearing a protective mask, but inside stung by hurt and betrayal. I wanted to yell at him and I wanted him to hug me all at the same time. I wanted to run at him with fists flailing and hit him right in the stomach, and I wanted to tell him I loved

him. I couldn't believe that it was my dad who was doing this. How could he? My hurt sat inside like a rock. *Oh, no! Please, please no! I'm not the apple of my daddy's eye anymore. I've been replaced. He traded me in like some old, useless car. Why would he leave me for them? Why?* That day marked my first plunge into a fatherless abyss of isolation and abandonment.

I saw my dad only a few more times during my childhood and teenage years. He was gone. Birthdays and Christmases came and went without any contact. If I could have put into words all that was in my heart, I would have said, "I'm your daughter. You have to love me. Don't you ever even think about me? Don't you ever wonder how I'm doing, if I get good grades, or what kind of food I like? Don't you want to know me?" The answers to those questions never came, and my heart began to harden. Slowly I began to descend into a murky desolate place. I was filled with painful confusion and a deep-seated sense of being utterly alone.

Years stacked upon years of pain, loss, and poor choices left me empty and aching. Finally, in my late twenties, God dramatically rescued me and made me His own. My heart was captured in a moment as love and peace flooded my being in a way that defies description. I knew in a split second that the gospel was true and was even true for me. The Lord "reached down from on high and took hold of me" (Psalm 18:16). He drew me out of the murky waters and breathed life into me, and I've never been the same.

Not long afterward, God gave me another beautiful surprise: a perfect Father. As a new Christian, I stumbled across this verse: "Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me" (Psalm 27:10). A light dawned in the first moment I discovered that God would be my Father and has never dimmed. It's only grown brighter as I settle ever deeper into my place as a daughter of the Most High King.

Whatever your story, whatever happens in your gut when you hear the word *father*, I pray that this study will give you an opportunity to allow God to father you in new ways. As we gaze together on healing

images in Scripture of the ultimate Father, may He reveal Himself to you as your perfect Abba Father, full of wisdom, tenderness, and love.

Pause for a moment and jot some notes here or in a journal to describe your personal story, or map out a timeline showing where you are now on your journey. What prompted you to focus some time studying God the Father?

Try meditating on Paul Oakley's song "Father Me." Cry out to God and ask Him for a heart that can receive the kind of fathering described in the following lyrics:

You have loved me with such perfect love  
 Fathered me with such a tender touch  
 Your faithfulness surrounds my soul  
 Your mercy lifts my head  
 How could I repay all you have done?

Father me, faithful Father  
 Father me, no one else could ever be  
 The perfect Father God to me

You now clothe me with your righteousness  
 Hide me in the shadow of your wings  
 And even in my darkest days  
 Your light will guide my way  
 Hallelujah to the King of grace<sup>t</sup>

## Ponder Scripture

There's a popular notion that depicts everyone as God's child. It is true that we are all created by and in the image of God, but what is necessary for us to receive the privilege of being called a child of God? John 1:12-13 says, "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." To become Abba's child, we must receive Jesus—we must choose to believe in Him.

When I first met Marissa, she saw herself as a child of Mother Earth. She explained some of her Wiccan beliefs and then launched into her reasons for rejecting Christianity. Marissa believed that Christianity was all about worshipping a harsh God who arbitrarily throws people into hell and offers no avenue of redemption. No one had ever told her about the God of love, who sacrificially gave His Son so that people could be forgiven. She didn't know she could become a precious child of the One who created all the earth. I explained the wonder of God the Father giving Jesus to pay the penalty for our sin. We talked about His death, His resurrection, and His desire to know her and give her life. The room filled with the fresh scent of hope and new life as Marissa accepted the loving hand extended to her and became a daughter of the King.

If you have already embraced this gift of life, I hope you will simply review the following verses and allow the wonder of the gospel to wash over you in a fresh way. If you have not received the gift of being reborn through belief in Jesus Christ, I hope today will be a new birthday for you. Please read the following verses out loud, personalizing them by putting your name in the blanks:

For God so loved [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] that he gave his one and only Son, that [if \_\_\_\_\_ ]

believes in him [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

That if [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] confess[es] with [her] mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe[s] in [her] heart that God raised him from the dead, [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10:9-10)



These verses shout out the invitation to a relationship with an amazing God. We accept the invitation by turning to God and admitting our sin and need of forgiveness. We can choose to believe in Jesus, His death on the cross, and His resurrection on our behalf. I consider it an honor to invite you to take your place as a beloved child of almighty God. You can accept that invitation by praying the following prayer:

*Lord, I know that I have sinned and need the forgiveness and life You offer. I believe that You died to pay for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn away from my old life and turn to You. Please forgive me and grant me courage to walk in the path You have for me. Thank You for making me clean and for blessing me with the privilege of becoming a child of God.*

Whether you celebrated being reborn today or long ago, you were reborn. You were made new. Second Corinthians 5:17 exclaims, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” You get a “do-over”—you are no longer fatherless, abandoned, or on the outside looking in. Your identity is whole and complete.

Pause for a moment and offer the Lord thanks for the gift of new life. Sing a song, write in your journal, draw a picture, take a walk, or hug a child. Do whatever expresses your heart best.

Our identity as children of God is real, but in the midst of daily life, we accumulate wounds, uncertainty characterizes some relationships, and we forget who we are and where we fit in. Our hearts become clouded with fear, and we resort to wearing masks. Brennan Manning wrote,

 The greatest gift I have ever received from Jesus Christ has been the Abba experience. “No one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27). My dignity as Abba’s child is my most coherent sense of self. When I seek to fashion a self-image from the adulation of others and the inner voice whispers, “You’ve arrived; you’re a player in the Kingdom enterprise,” there is no truth in that self-concept. When I sink into despondency and the inner voice whispers, “You’re no good, a fraud, a hypocrite, and a dilettante,” there is no truth in any image shaped from that message.<sup>2</sup> 

Do Manning’s words strike a chord with you? In what way? Would you be more likely to build a self-image by seeking approval or to berate yourself and construct a negative image?

Our true image is revealed in Scripture. Read Romans 8:15-16:

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.

When we call God *Abba Father*, we are using a term of personal endearment. According to *Strong’s Dictionary of Bible Words*, *Abba* is a name “framed by the lips of infants” and “betokens unreasoning trust.” When the word *Abba* is paired with Father, “the two together express the love and intelligent confidence of the child.”<sup>3</sup> We literally call God “Daddy.” Our Daddy is so powerful, yet He tenderly beckons us to cry out to Him with the confidence of a beloved little girl.

Try addressing God as Abba Father. When you speak the words *Abba Father* out loud, what do the words do?

- ◆ Have a flat echo
- ◆ Stir fear
- ◆ Bring about apprehension
- ◆ Bring tears to your eyes
- ◆ Unveil longings
- ◆ Fill you with hope
- ◆ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Read out loud Romans 8:15-16 in Eugene Peterson’s translation, *The Message*:

This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It’s adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike “What’s next, Papa?” God’s Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are.

How would you define *timidity*? In what ways might you be timid in your relationship with your Abba Father?

Journal about or draw a picture of what it would look like to live “adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike ‘What’s next, Papa?’” How would your day change? What would greeting each day in this way do to your stress level?

## Reflect

Sometimes it is hard to open ourselves to the Father’s touch because we simply don’t know what is missing or what fathering could look like. We have no point of reference. Over the next couple of days, be attentive to interactions between fathers and daughters of any age. Are they relating silently, are they interacting boisterously, or do they seem distant? Are they smiling or deep in thought? Watch for fresh glimpses as you skim the latest news or watch a movie. The following are a few observations to get you started:

- ◆ A local newspaper published an article about an annual father/daughter dance. Little girls and grown women dressed as

though they were going to the prom were photographed dancing with their daddies.

- ◆ The movie *Father of the Bride* shows a doting, protective, and often obsessive father reluctantly preparing to give his daughter away in marriage.
- ◆ The coach in the movie *Remember the Titans* lets his daughter encroach on male territory with his welcome and blessing. Her daddy refuses to manipulate her, and he includes her in his work and his world.
- ◆ A young woman watched the easy give-and-take between a friend and her dad, noting the display of natural affection.
- ◆ Another woman watched a father hurrying through the mall and ignoring the attempts of his little girl to catch up or talk to him.
- ◆ A three-year-old girl buries her head on her daddy's shoulder and falls asleep, oblivious to her surroundings.

What observations would you like to add?

Reflect on your collection of images. What tugs at your heart? Where do you feel raw? What triggers a response you don't understand?

Take note of yearnings that are unearthed and feelings of envy or wistfulness. Which images help you create a template of a loving father/daughter relationship? Pause for a moment to journal your thoughts.

Set aside some time this week to write a description of your “dream dad.” Seal it in an envelope and put it aside to be revisited at the end of the study. You may also wish to begin an “Abba scrapbook” and add to it a little each week or use your journal as your scrapbook. I pray that as we continue, you will discover in Scripture images of the perfect Father that will more than fill every empty place in your heart.

## Respond

Psalm 62:8 exhorts, “Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.” Cry out to Him. Bundle up every empty space, hope, dream, moment of pain or elation, and lay them before your Abba Father. If you find it helpful, say them out loud or list them in your journal.

Your Abba Father has heard your cries and is able to use each broken place or happy memory as a window of opportunity to know Him in a new way.

God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us. (Ephesians 3:20, MSG)

Even if you've always seen yourself as fatherless, stuck, orphaned, or unwanted in any way, God is able to embrace you and transform your identity.

Ponder Psalm 18:24:

GOD rewrote the text of my life  
when I opened the book of my heart to his eyes. (MSG)

Abba can rewrite your story and give you a brand-new life as His cherished daughter. He welcomes you and longs to gather you into His arms. Will you pray with me and open the book of your heart to Him?

*Abba Father, thank You for rewriting the story of who I am and making me Your very own little girl. Make the truth of who I am as Your child real to me. Take me by the hand and walk me through each moment, giving me eyes to see the many ways You are fathering me. You know my fear and my pain. You know about the aching places no one sees. Please give me courage to open myself more to You each day. Teach me to let down my guard with You, to relate to You with no trace of suspicion. Let Your Word come alive to me and penetrate my heart. I want to live in the delight and freedom of being loved and embraced by You. Amen.*