

SRMBC Family Bible Study
“I Can Only Imagine” - Discovering The Father’s Love
September 2018
Reverend Thomas A. Keys, Pastor

In the film, I Can Only Imagine, the life story of MercyMe lead singer Bart Millard is told for the first time. Bart grew up with an abusive father and a distant mother, and in early adulthood, came face to face with his own deep need for acceptance. His lack of love from his earthly father challenged his faith and hope in his heavenly Father.

But our God is in the business of redemption—of working miracles. Bart’s story mirrors so many of our own lives and gives fresh hope to those of us longing to hear the words, “With you, I am well pleased.” What does it look like to discover God’s love and acceptance first hand? In this study leader’s guide, we will take a four-week journey into the Father’s heart. And the best way to discover God’s heart is through the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus’ life demonstrates his eternal connection to the Father and best reveals the heart of God.

Lesson Title	Date	Scripture/Movie
Week 1 – Imagine a Loving Father	9/5/2018	Matthew 3
Week 2 – Imagine Forgiveness	9/12/2018	Luke 15
Week 3 – Imagine Redemption	9/19/2018	Luke 4
Week 4 – Imagine Going Home	9/26/2018	John 14
SRMBC Family Movie Night?	9/28/2108	“I Can Only Imagine”

By walking with Jesus in the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—we will find the smiling face of God Almighty in the words and actions of his Son. Imagine a loving Father. Imagine complete forgiveness. Imagine restoration to God and others. Imagine discovering your true home in the Lord.

God is love. Let’s walk with Jesus through the Gospels to discover this life-changing reality.

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September 5, 2018

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Week 1 – Imagine a Loving Father – Matthew 3

This week, we are starting a new curriculum set called I Can Only Imagine. Each week, we'll watch and discuss a short video, read through a passage of Scripture from one of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John), and discuss how God reveals himself to us through the life of Jesus.

Group Discussion

What were you taught about God growing up? Was your family religious when you were young?

What I Was Taught About God	My Family’s Religious Experience
Everywhere at the same time	We only went to church on Easter
God is good	We did say “Grace” before family meals
God don’t play (and you better not play with Him)	We were told as kids to never play around the church or sit on the church steps
God loves everybody	On Sunday morning – my dad would always play “the Spirituals” (Gospel Music)
If you are good and live a good life you will go to heaven when you die	Although we had a Bible in the home – we very rarely read it
He understands when sin “a little bit”	

READ MATTHEW 3:13 – 17

This week’s video is about 12 minutes, and then we’ll discuss. EPISODE 1: Imagine A Loving Father

- 1. Bart remembers feeling “incredibly alone. And it was devastating”. Describe your relationship with your earthly father. What was he like growing up?**

My relationship with my Father	What my Dad was like
He was close to me – but not overly emotional	He was a hard, faithful worker
I always wanted to be like him – (hard worker – family man)	He taught us how to work – making us do chores
We would watch sports and some movies together	He really loved my Mommy
I never really got to know him as much as I would have liked	He would often curse when he was mad (but would not allow us too)
	He smoked and drank way too much – (dying of Lung Cancer at 48)

2. **Bart says, “most of my life was living in fear. When [his anger] is so sporadic, you don’t know what’s going to set him off.” Is there a connection between this and trying to earn God’s love and salvation?**

Some people have a misconception of God because of our relationships with our earthly father. Our fathers loved us – but they are/were not perfect. Since all of us are sinners none of us can love as perfectly as God does

His wrath is real – but His Love is just as real (Rom 5:8; Eph. 2:4)

- When we have an unbalanced fear – we try to do works to appease Him (Rom. 1:17; Eph 2:10)
- Our sin is so great that there is no way we could ever earn His love (Rom 3:23; 6:23)
- God loves for us is so great – that He freely gives it unconditionally (Jer. 31:3; John 3:16-17)

In 1981, a Minnesota radio station reported a story about a stolen car in California. Police were staging an intense search for the vehicle and the driver, even to the point of placing announcements on local radio stations to contact the thief. On the front seat of the stolen car sat a box of crackers that, unknown to the thief, were laced with poison. The car owner had intended to use the crackers as rat bait. Now the police and the owner of the VW Bug were more interested in apprehending the thief to save his life than to recover the car. So often when we run from God, we feel it is to escape his punishment. But what we are actually doing is eluding his rescue.

3. **According to Matthew 3, how does God the Father think and feel about His son, Jesus Christ?**

*16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and **He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.** 17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “**This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.**”*

- God shows His **Acceptance** of His Son - **the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.**
- God shows His (public) **Affirmation** of His Son - **a voice came from heaven.**
- God shows His (personal) **Affection** for His Son - **This is My beloved Son.**
- God shows His **Approval** of His Son - **whom I am well pleased.**

Since we are the sons and daughters of God through faith in Jesus Christ – God sees us and loves us just as He sees and loves His Son.

4. **How does this passage reflect the truths that “God is love”?**

*7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because **God is love.***

*15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. **God is love,** and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*

- This passage shows us how God truly feels toward His own Son.
- This passage shows us what His love really looks like.
- The shows how God's love flows from who He is.
- God shows His Love of Jesus – even before He did anything out of the ordinary

5. Matthew 3 describes God's Fatherly presence in two ways: God is present/God makes His presence felt. Which of these realities resonates with you most? Which do you find hard to believe?

God Is Present	God Makes His Presence Felt
God is presence is with me everywhere and in any situation. (Psalm 139:7 -12)	God's presence is felt through His peace that He gives. (John 14:7)
God is present and always ready to hear my prayers. (Psalm 50:15)	God makes His presence felt by answering my prayers (Matt. 7:7 – 8).
God's presence is my protection (Psalm 23)	God makes His presence felt though His calm in trouble (Isa. 26:3)
God's is present in His Word and is available to me (II Tim. 3:16 – 17).	God's Spirit reminds me of His Word and His promises (John 14:26)

6. Describe a time when you've longed for a Heavenly Father?

- I remember while I was in the Army in the 1st Desert Storm. We were preparing to on a dangerous Combat Mission in Iraq. I need somebody bigger than me and all of us to see us through.
- When my own father passed away in 1991(48 years old). We all needed our Heavenly Father.

7. How have you seen God's Fatherly presence in your own story of faith?

- I have seen His presence when He called out to me and showed me how sinful I am yet also showed his great Love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.
- When I made the biggest mess of my life and of my ministry He restored me.
- I was sick and could've been/should have dead and gone (blood clots in my leg and lungs He healed me.

8. Bart says he was "desperate" to experience the good news about Jesus after such a difficult childhood. Would you describe yourself as desperate to know God?

- There are times in my life when I am not as desperate (comfortable, overconfident, failure...)
- Especially now – when seeking to serve and minster to this church – I am desperate to know Him.
- As I reflect on the Love of God through Jesus and His Sacrifice for me - I want to know Him – Jesus Christ the Son of the Living God.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for this message of Your Fatherly Presence. We pray now that Your Holy Spirit would remind us of these great truths throughout the week. May we experience You as our true Heavenly Father. We pray that this study would open our eyes to who You truly are, Lord. We love You and trust You. Amen.