

A Journey into the Father

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I. INTRODUCTION

We're going to take a 1-week break from our Ephesians study this week and take what I'd like to call a journey into the Father...a journey that is made possible for each of us because of Christ's work on the cross. I was looking at the remaining material we have to cover in Ephesians and it looks like we'll have about 3 or 4 more messages before the Lord takes us in a new direction of our study of His Word. In our last message on Ephesians, we finished up on husbands and wives in marriage and as we enter chapter 6 (the final chapter) next week we'll be looking at the relationship between kids and parents and specifically at the role of fathers...how we should each relate to our own parents and how father's should relate to their kids.

I had the privilege of giving the chapel messages at Grande Ronde Academy over the last 2 weeks and my job was to teach the song "Good Good Father" and share some of what Scripture teaches us about our perfect heavenly Father. So as we get ready to study in Ephesians about children, parents and fathers, it seemed to me like this would be a great time to clear up what might be our own damaged picture of what a father is and forever fix in our mind what a perfect father is like.

When you think of the word, "Father," or "dad," what images come to mind? In one of our small groups at youth group recently I asked this question and I got a wide variety of responses, most of them positive and close to what a good father should be. However, one of the responses was something to the effect of "a back-stabbing jerk."

Clearly our image of a father can be developed out of our own personal experience with our imperfect human fathers, and not one of us in this room have had a perfect human dad. In fact some of you out there have probably had really terrible dads that seriously impacted your understanding of what a dad is and may still create a barrier to your understanding what your heavenly Father is like.

How many of you have parents remember the TV shows called, "The Waltons" or "Little House on the Prairie?" Well what you'll remember from watching these shows, is that in "The Waltons" the dad was always available and in "Little House on the Prairie," Laura's dad was always there to comfort her in tough times. What a different situation than we often see in TV shows today where dads are often out of the picture or portrayed as too busy with their lives and other priorities. And in day to day real life these days, dads and husbands just tend to be extremely busy with other things or working or playing too much. Dads these days are too often passive bystanders, distracted or absent altogether. Things have certainly changed since the time periods portrayed in "Little House on the Prairie" and "The Waltons."

Some years ago, Dr. Charlie Shedd held a contest called "One Neat Dad." He asked contestants to send in letters recommending their dad for this great honor. Here's a list of the ten most appreciated qualities for "One Neat Dad."

1. He takes time for me.
2. He listens to me.
3. He plays with me.
4. He invites me to go places with him.
5. He lets me help him.
6. He treats my mother well.
7. He lets me say what I think.
8. He is nice to my friends.
9. He only punishes me when I deserve it.
10. He is not afraid to admit when he is wrong.

That sounds like a great dad, doesn't it? How are we doing dads? Well one thing we can notice is that the key element involved in each of the top 5 is time. What's most important to kids is that their dad is willing to give time to them and make being with them and doing things with them a high priority.

So we know that none of us have had perfect dads or are currently being perfect dads...dads who never lose their tempers, always have time for their kids, never make mistakes, always treat their wives perfectly, and always put their families above what they may want personally...

But the great truth for each of us who have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord is that we each now have a perfect dad. We call Him God the Father and today I'd like to take you on a journey into Him and hopefully give each of you a glimpse of just how amazing He is. He's so amazing in fact that what we'll cover today will just scratch the surface of our perfect Father...and even through all of eternity in His presence I don't think we'll ever fully understand how mind-blowing and amazing He is.

So we're going to cover a lot of territory in this study today, so I've made a PowerPoint to help keep us focused and to display the appropriate verses rather than asking you to look up each one. And I want to remind you that you can get a printed copy of each of the points and verses on our website (once I get it posted) if you want to review them later or do more study. So rather than desperately trying to write it all down in your notes today, I just want to encourage to relax and absorb each of these truths about our perfect Father as we go through them.

I want to start by looking at what our heavenly Father is like according to Scripture, and then we'll look at what happens in our lives when we really begin to get to know Him, experience His love personally, and finally start walking by the power of the Holy Spirit He's given to each of us.

II. WHAT IS OUR HEAVENLY FATHER LIKE?

A. The Father is light; there is no darkness in Him. He is perfect in all of His ways (James 1:17; 1 John 1:5; Matthew 5:48).

Do you know anyone else who has no darkness in them at all? No selfishness, no dark secrets, no wrong motives, always thinking of what's best for other people...

B. The Father, before the creating the world, planned out and established all the details of the future (Acts 1:6-8)

He is sovereign and all-knowing. He knows all the details of the future and past and present and is in perfect control of all things, accomplishing His will through it all. Remember the song we sing: *Before There Was Time*. He knows you completely, inside and out. He counted the hairs on your

head...He knew all the words that you've said and will ever say...He made a plan to rescue you before you even needed rescuing...And He makes sure that through all the things that happen in the world, His will still gets accomplished and His purposes still stand...

- C. The Father has poured out his love on you by adopting you as His very own child through Christ. You can now call Him, "Daddy" (1 John 3:1-3; John 1:12; Galatians 4:4-7).**

How many of you remember the story I told you in one of my sermons about Nigel, the orphan living on the streets who was adopted by the king? This is what has happened to each of us. We've gone from living on the street to living in the courts of the King. We have a new identity and we find our value in the love God has poured out on us. The essence of who we are now and what gives us eternal value is the unchangeable fact that we are loved by God and have become His very own children forever! That's who I am now...That's my forever identity...a child loved by God.

- D. The Father is full of mercy. His mercy has caused you to be born again, to obtain an eternal inheritance, and to be protected by His power (1 Peter 1:3-5).**

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

Mercy is not giving to people what they deserve. How many of you find it easy to be merciful to other people when they've wronged you? Well, our Father is the Father of mercy. He's the One that invented it and the One who is the very best at giving it out. Each of us deserves his anger and punishment... but instead He gives us mercy through Christ and takes away the penalty that we deserve. His mercy has caused us to be born again...to become something totally new.

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” Do you believe you’re new today?

Through his mercy He’s also given us an eternal inheritance. We have amazing riches waiting for us in heaven...riches that we can’t even begin to comprehend...riches that will never rust, be stolen, lose their value, or spoil.

And through His mercy he is protecting us right now by His power. And if God is for us, who can be against us? We have the most powerful being in the universe actively watching out for us and fighting our battles.

E. The Father comforts you in all of your troubles and gives you hope (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Don’t you wish sometimes that people truly cared about you and felt real sympathy for the struggles and challenges and pain you face in your life? Well, your heavenly Father does that perfectly and in fact He’s given us His Holy Spirit, who is called the Comforter, to be with us always....to comfort us, guide us, give us strength. And Jesus, our Savior, has also faced all the challenges we’ve faced and more and sympathizes with our weaknesses. Our Three-in-One God cares deeply about us and comforts in our pain and challenges. Remember the shortest verse in the Bible? “Jesus wept.” Our God cares enough about you to cry for you.

F. The Father gives you grace and peace (Philemon 1:3).

Grace is unmerited favor. It’s someone treating you well, when you’ve treated them terribly. It’s a lot like mercy. And the Father’s grace isn’t just ordinary grace...it’s amazing grace!

And what about peace? Do you ever get worried or frantic or feel like life’s out of control? Well our Father is ready to replace those feelings with peace whenever you turn to Him, instead of allowing yourself to worry and stress when facing difficult things in your life. He’s the only One who can give you true and lasting peace in all situations. ALL!

G. The Father is with you at all times. You are never alone and He is never too busy for you (John 16:32-33).

Can your earthly dad be with you at all times every day? No. He has to work at his job and get a lot of things done, and he can't always devote his full attention to you or go with you everywhere you go. But your heavenly Father is with you every second of every day, everywhere you go, and He is never, ever, ever too busy for you.

H. The Father knows all about you and knows what you need before you even ask Him (Matthew 6:7-8; Matthew 10:29-31).

Your heavenly Father knows absolutely everything about you, inside and out...every passing thought...every hurting area inside of you...every dream you've ever had... And He also knows what's best for you and where you will succeed and where you will fail. He's always working for your good. No matter what happens to you in your life He will always be using it to bring about good in your life.

I. The Father knows how to give you good and perfect gifts and He likes to do it (James 1:17).

Did you know your heavenly Father likes to give you gifts and blessings? Have you ever had someone in your life who gives you really bad gifts? Maybe you have a grandma who always gives you a pair of ugly socks for Christmas or a hideous sweater. Well, the Father never gives bad gifts. Sometimes the gifts He gives us may not be what we think we wanted, but they are always for our good and based on his complete knowledge about who we are and what we need.

J. The Father cares for you tenderly and tells you not to worry about your life (Matthew 6:25-32; Matthew 10:29-31). TWO SLIDES

Your heavenly Father treats you tenderly and carefully watches over your life. He takes care of your needs and wants you to simply trust Him and give up worrying about things. He's made constant peace available to you at all times. When you start to worry, hand it over to the Father and He will give

you peace and take care of your needs. Instead of spending your energies worrying and complaining, had those things over to Him and spend your energies finding your joy in Him and getting to know Him more. He'll take care of all the other concerns of life.

- K. The Father is fully committed to you and will go to great lengths to rescue you and bring you back into fellowship if you go astray (Matthew 18:12-14).**

Jesus gave us a beautiful picture of this amazing truth about the Father in the Bible. SHARE PRODIGAL SON STORY....When God ran.

- L. The Father has reserved a home for you in heaven and Jesus is currently preparing it for you (John 14:1-4).**

You have a beautiful future waiting for you with your heavenly Father. He's reserved a place for You in heaven and Jesus currently getting it ready for you. I promise it will exceed your wildest expectations. You won't be disappointed!

So we've gotten a glimpse of what our perfect heavenly Father is like, but what difference does this make for my life today. I can see that He's amazing and that He cares about me, but what happens when I draw near to Him, seek Him in His Word and allow Him to have His way in my life? Well that's what we want to figure out now from Scripture and as we get ready next week to learn how He calls us to relate to our earthly dads and how to be good fathers ourselves.

III. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DRAW NEAR TO OUR FATHER?

Well the first thing we need to understand if we're going to get to know our heavenly Father and draw near to Him is this:

- A. If you want to know what the Father is like, get to know Jesus Christ (John 14:7-10).**
- B. We exist for the Father. He's the reason for our existence and the purpose of it (1 Corinthians 8:6).**

C. The Father has given us the Holy Spirit to live inside us, keep His presence with us always, and make it possible for us to represent Him well as His children (Galatians 4:4-7; John 15:26-27; John 14:16-17; John 16:13-15).

D. You can't love the world and the Father at the same time (1 John 2:15-17).

You're loving the world if you're finding your hope and joy in physical pleasure, material things, or in exalting yourself. What do you live for? Where do you find your hope for each day? Where do you look when you're feeling depressed or struggling to keep going each day? What goal are you currently working towards that you think will finally get you what you need and bring you satisfaction in life?

E. The Father asks you to make your highest priority seeking Him, sharing your life with Him, and allowing Him to change you from the inside out. (Matthew 6:25-33)

When we make these things our primary focus, He takes care of the rest of life's concerns, gives us amazing gifts, and blesses us beyond what we can even imagine. Seek Him first and all these things will be added to you.

F. The Father wants to give you what you need to make good choices, know Him more, and walk by His power (Ephesians 1:17-23).

When we seek Him earnestly in prayer, He gives us wisdom and direction for the future, invites us into close relationship with Him, pours out His love on us, and gives us His power to meet all of life's challenges.

G. As a perfect Father, God disciplines us as His sons for our good (Hebrews 12:7-11; John 15:1-2).

He's the vinedresser that cuts out the dead and diseased branches so that we'll be healthy and bearing fruit. TALK ABOUT MY CHALLENGES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WITH "F's" IN BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDE...AND THE DISCIPLINE OF HAULING WOOD...

H. We bring glory to the Father when we abide in Jesus Christ, walk by the power of the Spirit, and bear fruit (John 15:1-8).

Notice it begins with abiding in Jesus Christ...dwelling with Him...sharing our lives with Him...feeding on His Word. It also continues forever in this same manner...a forever love relationship with Jesus Christ where we walk by the power of His Spirit and allow Him to bring transformation and fruit in our lives...thereby bringing glory to our Triune God rather than ourselves.

I. The Father uses His Word to change us and make us more like Him (John 17:17).

Truth is transforming when it's believed...when we do more than just hear it, but actually begin to act on it.

J. As the Father changes us through His Word, we will learn to love Him and love other people like He loves us (John 15:10-14).

If we're abiding with Christ and allowing the Father to change us through His Word, we will begin truly loving and caring about other people. If that's not happening, something's wrong and we've gotten off track somewhere.

K. The Father teaches us to let go of revenge and instead love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:43-45; Luke 6:35-36).

The Father calls us to be merciful to all and to release anger and leave it in His hands. Isn't it just natural for us to want to repay wrongs that are done to us? Isn't it so easy to take the emotion of anger and allow it to become sin as we let it settle down inside us and plan how to take revenge? And even though we know that holding anger inside is physically bad for us and leads us away from peace and close fellowship with God, still it's so easy to hold it there and refuse to hand it over to God. So why do we do it?

Dallas Willard, in his book, "The Divine Conspiracy," has some great thoughts on this question. He says, "Anger indulged, instead of simply waved off, always has in it an element of self-righteousness and vanity. Find a person who has embraced anger, and you find a person with a wounded ego. The

importance of the self and the real or imaginary would done to it is blown out of all proportion by those who indulge anger. Then anger can become anything from a low-burning resentment to a holy crusade to inflict harm on the one who has thwarted me or my wishes or bruised my sense of propriety...”

“Only this element of self-righteousness can support me as I retain my anger long after the occasion of it or allow its intensity to heat to the point of totally senseless rage. To rage on I must regard myself as mistreated or as engaged in the rectification of an unbearable wrong, which I all too easily do.”

Well the Father, who has every reason to be angry and pour out His wrath on each of us, has chosen instead to rescue us and forgive us and pour out his wrath on His own Son instead. And if anyone had a reason to be angry and to seek revenge, it would be Jesus Christ. A completely innocent and good man, He was tortured, mocked, abused and hung on a cross to die for crimes he didn't commit. He endured the white-hot wrath of God the Father for sins that he did not commit. And yet what were some of His final words as He hung on the cross? “Father forgive them...”

As the recipients of this incredible mercy through Christ, can't we do the same and forgive those who we believe have wronged us? Can't we stop insisting on our own self-righteousness and perfect motives, and instead come to humility, recognizing our own failings and imperfections, and offer the grace we've received to other people? Can't we learn to be like our Father and our Savior and release the anger and bitterness and desire for revenge to Him?

Yes, we can...because with the Father all things are possible.

L. With the Father, all things are possible (Mark 14:36; Matthew 19:26).

IV. CONCLUSION

Let's close today by looking at that list again of the 10 most appreciated qualities of a good dad, but this time let's see how our heavenly Father fits the bill:

1. He takes time for me.
2. He listens to me.
3. He plays with me.
4. He invites me to go places with him.
5. He lets me help him.
6. He treats my mother well.
7. He lets me say what I think.
8. He is nice to my friends.
9. He only punishes me when I deserve it.
10. He is not afraid to admit when he is wrong.