

NEXT: The Gospel and the Next Generation

The Fatherhood of God

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The Fatherhood of God Matthew 6:9

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Matthew 6. The reality of adoption—a picture—reminds every one of us as Christ-followers that we belong to a heavenly Father. That's the picture of adoption; that ultimately and eternally we belong to Him as His children. And this is... In a sense, this is the essence of what it means to even be a follower of Christ. J.I. Packer—in one of my favorite books of all time, *Knowing God*—said, "What is a Christian?" Packer said, "The richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father. If you want to know how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all."

To the extent of which, Packer says, you grasp what it means to have God as Father is the extent to which you've grasped Christianity. Or maybe even grasped whether or not you're a Christian at all.

Listen to this quote from John Wesley. It's a short quote, but follow this. Wesley—a little background. Graduate... Honor graduate from Oxford University, ordained in the clergy, Church of England, solid theology in many, many different ways—somewhere I might disagree with him here and there, but solid in theology. Known for his good deeds, regularly visited inmates in prisons, workhouses in London, helped distribute food and clothing to slum children and orphans, studied the Word diligently, attended numerous services every Sunday as well as services during the week, gave generously to the church, gave to the poor, prayed, fasted, lived a strong moral life. Even spent several years as a missionary to what was then the British colony of Georgia. Came over to serve as a missionary among Native Americans here. And so this was the picture of Wesley's life and yet after spending several years as a missionary, he sailed back to England and when he got there, wrote in his journal that he had still not yet become a Christian.

I want you to listen to this quote. Wesley said, "I who went to America to convert others was never myself converted to God." He said, "I had the faith of a servant but not that of a son." And all that Wesley was doing—all the stuff, all the great stuff—he had never entered into a relationship with God the Father. Everything he did, he did out of obligation to God as servant instead of out of intimacy with God as son.

And that alone begs the question all across this room in a religious culture, Birmingham church culture, "Are you a son, daughter? Do you—right where you're sitting—do you know God as Father?" I'm not asking if you go to church—obviously you do that, at least today. I'm not going to ask if you study the Bible, if you do this or that, if you've been on missions trips, this... I'm asking, "Do you know God as Father?" And if not, then today, in the next few minutes, I want you to hear...I want you to see a picture of God as Father and I want to invite you to become His son, daughter; to become a child of God in this room. Maybe to have that Wesley-type moment where you go from even being a servant to being a son.

And for those of you who would say, "Yes, I'm a child of God. I know God as Father," that today on this Father's Day, you would be deeply encouraged from the depth of your heart what it means to be His child and God to be your Father. What we're going to do is a little different than what we normally do. Instead of camping out just in one passage of Scripture, what we're going to do is we're going to look all over Scripture and particularly all over the New Testament. I want us to see the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. I want us to see a portrait in all the New Testament of God as Father and for us to realize what that means for all of us, you know?

During this series, we've gone through a variety of things that distinguish us. We've talked about manhood and womanhood and the differences and God's design in each. We've talked about husbands and wives. We've talked about parents and children. Singles. We've talked about what makes us different in many ways and God's unique designs for each of us as men and women, husbands, wives, parents, children, singles, whatever it is. But this is where I want to bring us all together and say, "This is what it means for us all to be children of God the Father." And so we're going to start with Matthew 6:9, a very familiar verse, and let that verse launch us into looking at two main truths today, two simple, glorious truths.

So Matthew 6:9—remember this is the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Jesus is speaking to His disciples and this is what He says in Matthew 6:9. He's teaching them about prayer and He says, "*Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.'*" Now, we hear that and—partly because the Lord's Prayer is so common to us, partly because we've read this passage of Scripture before—we're not astounded when we see these words from Jesus' mouth leap off the page. We're not awestruck by them and we should be awestruck by them. I want to show you why. Because what Jesus is saying here is new in a sense. It's revolutionary in every sense. See the background leading up to this?

This is the first book in the New Testament, right? Book of Matthew. Before this, Old Testament. In all of the Old Testament God is referred to as Father... In all the Old Testament He is referred to as Father only 15 times. In all the Old Testament. And none of those 15 times are the people of God ever told to pray to God as Father. But when you turn the page from the Old Testament into the New Testament, you get to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, these four gospels. In the four gospels alone, God is referred to as Father 165 different times.

You know what's cool? Out of those 165 times, there's only one time—I think it's Matthew 23:9, that's the only time—164 other times when God is mentioned as Father, it is in the context of Jesus talking specifically to His disciples. Now why that's significant is because when Jesus comes on the scene, this picture, this title of God as a Father just bursts on the scene with Him. And it bursts on the scene in relationship to those who are following Jesus. Then we see it throughout the rest of the New Testament as well. But the picture is you can only know God as Father through who? Through Jesus. That Jesus makes relationship with God as Father—prayer to God as Father, intimacy with God the Father—Jesus is the one who makes that possible.

So as we talk today about the care of God as Father for us and what it means to be His children, the reality is this is only applicable to those who have trusted in Jesus. So when I put "us" on here in the notes—He does this for "us," He does this for "us." That "us" is really only those who've trusted in Christ to save you from your sin and the picture that comes in the New Testament is to all who turn from their sin, trust in Christ. All of us have sin in our hearts, in our lives, that separates us from God, causes us to deserve the judgment of God, the wrath of God. Jesus comes on the scene; He takes the wrath of God the Judge upon Himself. He dies on the cross for our sins, rises from the grave in victory over sin so that all

who trust in Him—turn from their sins and trust in Him—can be reconciled to God. Not just made right before God the Judge but loved by God the Father to enter into an eternal family.

God is Our Father

And so I want us to see these two truths but these two truths really only apply to those who know God as Father through Christ. So here's truth number one. Top of your notes, God is our Father. That's the breathtaking truth that comes on the scene in the New Testament. I wish we had time but if you look in Matthew 5, 6 and 7—you search "Father," Matthew 5, 6 and 7—15 times in these three chapters alone Jesus mentions God as Father. Fifteen times in these three chapters alone. We're seven chapters into the New Testament and we've already seen God referred to as Father more than all of the Old Testament. He is our Father.

When we pray, we don't just pray, "Oh God, dreadful Creator of all things," or "Supreme ground of all being." When we pray, when you pray, Christian, you are not praying to some impersonal "ground of all being," some ambiguous grand picture way out there. You're praying to—yes, a grand God—but a God who is... Jesus comes on the scene and says, "When you pray, say 'Father. Dad.'" Oh, He has this immanency, grand and glorious transcendence to come to us as Father, as Dad.

The Contrast with Earthly Fathers...

So here's what Jesus does. He contrasts God the Father with earthly fathers, and then He describes the care of the heavenly Father for us. So I want to show you the contrast. Turn over to Matthew 7. Remember we're going to be all over. We're going to camp out here, a good bit here in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 7:9. Well, start in verse seven because I want you to see the context. Matthew 7:7, Jesus is again talking about prayer. Listen to what He says:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him (Matt. 7:7-11)!

I want you to see what Jesus is doing here. He's arguing from the lesser to the greater. He says, you know, if your son—dads in this room—if your son asks you for bread, you don't give him a stone. If he asks you for fish, you don't give him a snake. You give him what is good. It's what dads do. It's good. Jesus says, "...how much more?" Because you're evil. I want to be a good dad but the reality is, even the best dad in this room still has a sinful heart that is bent away from God toward sin. And the contrast Jesus sets up, He says we are evil; He is good. He's good. Everything about Him is good. There is no propensity toward sin at all in Him. Every dad still struggles with sin. As a result—believe it or not—every dad in this room is not right 100% of the time. Close, but not 100%.

And if that's the case, then that means every dad in this room—as best as they want to love their children—dads are not guaranteed to do what is best every single time. But your heavenly Father is. Let that soak in. Your heavenly Father is completely good and He always, always, always gives what is best. Now we struggle with that, don't we? Especially

in prayer. Jesus says, *"For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds..."* We think, "Well that's everyone but me."

Have you ever prayed for something for years and not received it? Have you ever pressed in and prayed hard for something and not received it and you begin...and then God begins to answer in ways you haven't asked for? So you're receiving what you didn't ask for and you're not receiving what you did ask for and you start to think, "I don't understand how prayer works." You start to begin to think that prayer is like this one big slot machine and you put enough coins in, maybe something good will come out of it. You don't know what. Know this—when you pray, you are never, ever, ever praying to a reluctant God. He's your Father. And you ask for one thing... You ask for bread, He's not going to give you a stone. Even when you don't understand the way He answers, know this—He is good. And He always gives the best to His children, 100% of the time. We're evil; He's good.

Keep going. We have limited wisdom; He has infinite wisdom. He is wise. God knows what is best as our Father. This is one of the characteristics I most admired in my dad. So wise. Such good advice, counsel, that I miss. And sometimes—I'll be honest it drove me nuts—even as an adult because sometimes I wouldn't take his advice because, you know, I was an adult now. Like I understood the situation far better than he did and I would always have to go back to him and say those dreadful words, "Dad, you were right." And yet as wise as my dad was, he obviously was not infallible in his wisdom. His wisdom was limited and that is never the case with our heavenly Father. He has infinite wisdom. When God gives something He never says, "Well, if I'd have known this was going to happen, I'd have done this differently. I'd have given you something different here." He always knows. When He answers prayer, He knows the effect of that on ten years from now, 100 years from now, 100 billion years from now for that matter. He has infinite wisdom and therefore He always gives what is best.

Tozer said, "With the goodness of God, to desire our highest welfare..." So put these together, He's good. "The goodness of God, to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it and the power of God to achieve it. What do we lack?" We can trust Him.

Final contrast, we have imperfect love; He has perfect love. Here's the beauty of it. God is a loving Father, far beyond the most loving father in this world. He's perfect. In all facets of His being He is perfect, including His love. This means—don't miss it—by the very nature of God, He can do nothing less than give the most and the best to His children because everything He does in our lives flows from perfect love for you and me. That's good.

Contrast the best father in this world. *"...How much more..."* Jesus says. Now we don't always understand this. Remember George Mueller? We've talked about him before a variety of different times. He was praying machine as he led this orphanage like almost nobody else in history. He would pray. He never made needs known public. He would pray. He specifically recorded 50,000 different specific answers to prayer. He'd pray and God would provide; he'd pray and God would provide.

And yet, amidst all of that, that doesn't mean George Mueller always got what he wanted when he prayed, what he asked for. You look deeper into his life and you realize that this man—this father with a heart for children like no other—he buried two stillborn children of his own. He saw his one-year-old son die; his adult daughter die and saw two wives pass away. I want you to hear what he said when he preached his first wife's funeral. I want you to hear obviously the love he had for her and then I want you to hear the diagnosis that came and hear Mueller's response. Listen to this. He said at the funeral:

Were we happy? Verily we were. With every year our happiness increased more and more. I never saw my beloved wife at any time, when I met her unexpectedly anywhere in Bristol, without being delighted to do so. I never met her even in the Orphan Houses, without my heart being delighted to do so. Day by day, as we met in our dressing room, at the Orphan Houses, to wash our hands before dinner and tea, I was always delighted to meet her, and she was equally pleased to see me. Thousands of times I told her—'My darling, I never saw you at any time, since you became my wife, without my being delighted to see you.'

So see that love. And then he begins to talk about the doctor, Mr. Pritchard, who came: "When I heard what Mr. Pritchard's judgment, that the malady was rheumatic fever, I naturally expected the worst. . . My heart was nigh to be broken on account of the depth of my affection."

And then he goes on and he says:

The last portion of Scripture which I read to my precious wife was this: 'The Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord will give grace and glory, no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.' Now, if we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have received grace. We are partakers of grace and to all such He will give glory also. I said to myself, with regard to the latter part, 'No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.' ...I am in myself a poor worthless sinner, but I have been saved by the blood of Christ; and I do not live in sin, I walk uprightly before God. Therefore, if it is really good for me, my darling wife will be raised up again; sick as she is. God will restore her again. But if she is not restored again, then it would not be a good thing for me. And so my heart was at rest. I was satisfied with God. And all this springs, as I have often said before, from taking God at His word, believing what He says.

Oh to believe that! That even in the worst of times, God is good. Oh, I ... A dear brother who I had the opportunity to walk alongside him and his family as his wife Gwen struggled with and passed away from cancer. And just beauty—beauty—and a picture of trust in the Lord. And Don just came up to me and handed me a book that Thomas Nelson has published that is coming out in the next month that is a reflection of God's grace in their whole journey for God's glory. And words can't describe the way God has provided for and then used this whole picture for His name's sake. To know this—I know there are people all across this room walking through all kinds of different challenges right... Know this—when you ask for bread from God He never, ever, ever gives a stone. He never gives a snake when you ask for... He always gives what is good, what is best, from perfect...from a fountain of perfect love, infinite wisdom and total goodness. He provides for His children.

The Care of our Heavenly Father...

That leads to, okay, care for our heavenly Father. And this is all over the New Testament, Matthew 6 included. As our Father, He loves us. That's talking about all who are in Christ. God our Father loves us. We don't have time to turn to all these places, but 1 John 3:1. John says, "*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God...*" See it. See the love He's lavished on us. And to think of it...

Heather and I were in Phoenix this last week and was preaching at the Southern Baptist Convention—I forgot to mention that last week but thank you for those who were praying; God was very gracious in that. And while we were out there, after the convention was over, we drove up real quickly to Sedona, north of Phoenix. That place is awesome! Okay, you've

got the Grand Canyon—that's pretty cool as well—in Arizona. But Sedona. These red rocks, like look at this picture up here on the screen with me. These rocks, they change color. Rocks on the side of mountains, they change colors as the day goes on. They just shine with radiation from the sunlight. We didn't take that picture. I found it on the internet. But that's what we saw. It's what we saw. Like, everywhere you go this is what you see. And you want to take a picture everywhere but pictures just don't do it justice. It's just grand and you look at that everywhere. At one point Heather looked at me and she just said, "I feel so small. So puny." It's just so grand. God's grandeur and His glory on display. You do have that sense. But then all of it...

Maybe to take it a step deeper and to realize that the God who made those mountains, who spoke and called them into being, the God from whose hand the sun radiates across the rocks, that God has called you His child. Oh, let that penetrate your heart, your soul. Not just the person beside you, in front of you, behind you or just all of us together. You, where you're sitting. Every one of you is in Christ. God has called you His child. What intimacy with the universal King of Creation! And this is exactly the whole tenor of what Jesus is saying in Matthew 6. You look at the beginning of this chapter, He's talking about giving and praying and fasting. And a day when it's like our day—people would give to be recognized by men, pray to be seen by men, fast to be honored by men.

Listen to what Jesus says. Look—when it comes to giving—verse three, Matthew 6, "*But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that [listen to verse four] your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you*" (Matt. 6:3-4). Same thing down in verse six. "*But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you*" (Matt. 6:6). You get to fasting, verse 17, "*But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you*" (Matt. 6:17-18).

Jesus says, "Give in secret, pray in secret, fast in secret." Why? Because it's in hiddenness. It's in what happens between you and the Father alone where reward is found. You see this; get this. Our hearts were made to find joy, not in receiving honor from men, but in experiencing hiddenness with God. Your heart was made to enjoy deepest intimacy and hiddenness with God your Father. It's in hiddenness where reward is found. Don't neglect this, brothers and sisters! Don't neglect hiddenness with the Father for anything. There is nothing, nothing, nothing in your life—no relationship, no job, no obligation, your work, your family duties, your bills, the things that you do—there is nothing in your life more important than intimacy with God the Father. Don't let even the best things of this world neglect you; cause you to neglect this one thing, intimacy with God the Father who loves you.

He loves us, He understands us. Look at what Jesus says right after that verse we read about prayer in verse six. Matthew 6:7, Jesus says, "*And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him*" (Matt. 6:7-8). Ha! What is that about? I thought the purpose of prayer was to inform God what I need and what I want. And Jesus says no. God is not up in Heaven with a notebook and a pen telling you to slow down so He makes sure to get all of your requests. He knows them before you even ask them.

That begs the question, "What's the point of prayer then?" Oh and this is where we realize the point of prayer. The point of prayer is not to inform God but to experience intimacy with the God who knows you and me better than we know ourselves. This goes so much deeper than a list of requests before God. Not that it's bad to lift things up but to know that our

Father knows the depth of our hearts. That there is nothing hidden from Him. That He understands and knows us, our circumstances. He knows what's going on in your life right now and in your family, in your home, in your work. He knows it better than you do. He understands. Psalm 139, the psalmist says: *"O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, [Before I even say what I'm about to say in just a second] you know it altogether"* (Ps. 139:1-4).

Brothers and sisters, no one understands you. Even the people that are closest to you do not understand you. But God understands you better than you understand yourself. Nothing is hidden from Him, which—if we can really be honest—is a bit of a frightening reality, isn't it? Especially when it comes to our propensity to sin. To know that the God of the universe, God your Father, knows every sinful thought from your mind. Every sinful thing in your heart. He knows all your thoughts. The thoughts that nobody else—even those who are closest to you—know. The motives. Every deed, action, every thought. He knows all, which would be a totally frightening reality for all of us if God was not our Father. And for Him to be Father means not only does He understand us, but—follow this—He forgives us.

He forgives us. So you get alone with God in the secret place, and you pray, *"and forgive us our debts [verse 12], as we also have forgiven our debtors..."* Verse 14, *"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."* Now the picture here is not... The picture here is one who comes to God already in relationship with Him as Father, as a son or daughter confessing sin. Not so they can remain in the family. Now follow this, when my sons have disobeyed me—it's happened two or three times, maybe four. When my sons... [That's obviously a lie.] So when my sons disobey me and they come to confess, ask for forgiveness, this is not about whether or not they can stay in the family. It's not a fear there. They are confessing that—not so they can stay my sons—they're confessing that so they can restore intimacy with their father.

And this is why as Christians we walk in continual confession. The closer we get to God, the more we see our need for His grace. We're constantly crying—not so we can be made right with God, because we are sealed in Christ—but so we can have intimacy with the Father and walk with Him. Oh child of God, do not let sin go unconfessed before Him. The foolishness. And some of you are doing it right now. Some of you in this room I know are trying to hide your sin from God or living like God doesn't know what's going on. You are a fool. He knows. And not only are you a fool to think you can hide it from Him but you would be foolish not to confess it before Him. He is a Father who delights—He delights!—He delights in forgiving you. What mercy, what grace from the Father's hand. To believe it and to receive it. And not to dwell in unconfessed sin and separated intimacy from the one who alone brings joy, satisfaction to our hearts. Oh, be done with unconfessed sin for your good and His glory. He forgives us.

He understands us, loves us, forgives us; He provides for us. Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:25. I'm just going to read this, vv.25-33:

Therefore I tell you [Jesus says], do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not

arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious [don't be worried], saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matt. 6:25-33).

Look at the birds, the flowers. When we were up in Sedona, there's this state park we found. And we go into the state park and they have this little theater in their visitor center that was supposed to be an introduction to the state park. So we thought, "This is cool, get some history and we'll see some of those grand pictures." Well we got in there and the video was not an introduction to the state park. The video was a monologue on hummingbirds in the state park. And it was the driest, most boring video. I mean, we sat there and first our jaws just kind of on the ground, like, "I thought we were going to see, like, grand pictures." Instead, "This is the red-billed hummingbird and it does..." and the guy, just totally monotone. And so we're sitting there for a while and just goes, "There's this hummingbird and then there's this hummingbird, and then there's this hummingbird." And it was just like one after another. After like 50 hummingbirds, we're like, "Okay, we've had it; we're going out. See some rocks!"

And we just sat there thinking, "Who cares about the hummingbirds?" And the reality is God does! He made that bill red. And He made this flower that this guy thinks is so cool. He made it that color. And this guy, and he's not showing it by his tone of voice but he thinks this is interesting and it's because God has made these birds interesting. And the reality is Jesus says, "Look at them. They're beautiful." God provides for every single one of them and all these weird things they do. And this guy thinks it's cool. All that... God does all of that. "...How much more?" They're not His children. You're His children. He provides for you. He knows all that you need.

Mark this down: Worry is a sure sign that you have forgotten you're a child of God. Worry at any moment... Worry is a sure sign. Maybe momentarily. When you get anxious, when you worry, know that that's a sure sign you've forgotten—momentarily—that you are a child of God. Because a child of God the Father never, ever, ever has a reason to worry. Never. Never has a reason. Do not be anxious about anything. He will provide for you. You can trust God the Father.

He provides for us; He disciplines us. He disciplines us. Turn with me over to Hebrews 12. We'll turn there and then we'll keep going in just a minute to Revelation. But Hebrews 12. And we're... Just a second and we'll read verse five. He disciplines us. Now who among us really enjoys discipline? None of us. None of us—in the moment—delights in discipline.

The other day after worship Heather and I were down here at the front and we were talking with a couple people separately. And both at the same time—our backs were kind of facing...we were facing this way so our backs were this way—the people we're talking to look over and they see one of our sons who is leaning over the baptismal with his head in the water. Not a good choice, son. And so Heather and I immediately leave our conversations, go over here to our son, and take him up to my office where we had some "good, God-honoring discipline" is the way I would describe it. And we made it clear that that is not a wise choice, not a good choice. He does not need premature immersion. For a variety of different reasons he does not need to get anywhere near that water again. And so that was good for him. He needed that. He needed that. Every child needs that. We're children. We need this. We need it, for our good. Hebrews 12:5 says:

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Don't resist the Father's discipline in your life. It is good to feel the sting of sin. It is good to feel—in a sense—to feel the pain associated with sin and its consequences because it shows us that we don't need to run back to it. God disciplines us for good.

He disciplines us and He leads us. He leads us. Romans 8:14; we don't have time to turn there. Romans 8:14, *"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."* Now let me say that again. Let that soak in. *"All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."* To be a son... Now it's interesting. This is one of those places where we don't see son and daughter mentioned and it's not because the Bible's just being chauvinistic here. The picture is when you see places in the New Testament where only "sons" is mentioned—not "sons and daughters"—the reality is first century culture the inheritance, the privilege, the family being passed on went to the "son." And so it's a good thing that men and women are both referred to as sons because the reality is there's no, there's no... Because you're female does not mean you're second place in the family of God. We're all sons of God, are receiving the full inheritance that comes from God.

And so the picture is, those who are led by Spirit of God are sons of God. To be a son, to be a child of God, is to have His Spirit. Now why is this so important? You think about it, Luke 11:13—we don't have time to go there either—but that's where Jesus, He kind of reiterates parallel what we saw in Matthew 7:7-11, *"Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?"* And what Jesus does is He changes it up a little bit in Luke 11:13. He says, *"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father..."* Now Matthew 7:11 said, *"...how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"* In Luke 11:13, Jesus says, *"...how much more will the heavenly Father give [instead of good gifts, Jesus says] the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*

I remember reading that and thinking, "Well what if I didn't ask for the Holy Spirit? What if I was asking for good gifts? Why does He give the Holy Spirit?" And the beauty is—don't miss this—you ask for wisdom in a difficult decision you're walking through right now? God doesn't just give you wisdom. He puts His Spirit—the Spirit of Wisdom—inside of you to lead and guide you through this whole decision-making process. Just doesn't... Doesn't just tell you what to do. He lives inside of you. Makes it a reality from the inside out. You ask for joy. You ask for peace. He doesn't just give joy. He doesn't just give peace. He puts His Spirit as the fountain of joy, the fountain of peace inside of you. Don't miss this. You ask... You ask for gifts and He gives the Giver. The Father in Heaven so desires to lead you that He has put His very Spirit inside of you so that you are never alone. The Father is always with you.

Oh, side note here. Over these past weeks in this series we've walked through manhood, womanhood, marriage, parenting, singleness. I know that there... The elders and I have been praying especially for you because I know that there are marriages that are struggling all across this room. Struggling in different severity. I know there are parents and children who are struggling. I know there are men and women who are looking back and seeing what Scripture says about manhood and womanhood and saying, "Aw, I missed it in this or that area of my life." Some struggling in singleness. And I know that as we've looked at these pictures in Scripture and what God has designed for marriage, singleness, parenting, manhood, womanhood, there's a tendency for some to just walk away almost discouraged thinking, "Aw, I'm so far behind." And I know that. And it can be—in a sense—a bit deflating.

About three weeks ago, I decided I was going to start training for a triathlon. And I rode my bike three times and ran twice. And then I found out that there was a triathlon like right up the street from us in Oak Mountain and it was three days later. And so I decided, "Well why not? I've ran my bike... ran twice and rode my bike three times. I think I'm ready." And so I signed up, very late. Very, very, very late. And so that meant I was at the very back of the pack. There were like 430 people. I was like 405, so there were only a few people behind me. You swim—which I had not trained for at all—then you bike and then you run. And so I get in the water, start to swim.

Well, I've run... I did a marathon once. And out of that 26 miles, around mile 21 or 22 is when I remember thinking to myself, "I am just not very smart for doing this. And a week from now, I'm going to think this was a good idea to have done this." And I tell myself, "Don't believe yourself a week from now. This is miserable and you should have never, ever, ever done this." So that was about mile 21, 22 in the marathon. Well, I got the same thought about a hundred yards into the swim. It's a 400 yard swim which doesn't sound like a long way but just a recommendation—I would encourage you to train in swimming before you do the swim.

So I'm in the middle of this lake up at Oak Mountain thinking, "Pastor drowns in lake." I'm a hundred yards into it; I'm miserable. There's these people riding around in canoes to make sure everybody's safe. I go up to one of the canoes and I grab onto it and I say, "Can I hold on here for a little while?" She's like, "Yeah, sure." And so I just...and I look, I kind of map it out. There's another couple of canoes. I'm just going to go from one canoe to the next.

Now my whole goal was not to finish last in the triathlon. Okay? My whole goal was not to finish last. So by the time I've grabbed onto a couple canoes, I'm looking behind and there's only like ten people behind me. There's a designated last-place finisher they have for these kind of things where somebody who's nice enough to come alongside the back and help those who are there. Well I see the guy and I'm like, "I cannot finish last." And so I finish kind of backstroking out of the water as best as I can. And then I go up to the bike—now there once were 400 plus bikes there. Well now there's ten left. And as I get on my bike, there's other people that have finished the swim and the bike and they're coming back in to park their bikes as I take mine out.

What that means is, as I get on the road to go out—it's six and a half miles out and six and a half miles back for the sprint triathlon—as I'm going out, that means all 400 of those people go right past me. And there's ... And so I... And it was demoralizing. Like, when I got back from the bike ride—okay, I've still got to run—there's people who've not only finished, walked their bikes back to the car, there're people that've put their bikes back on their car, gotten in their cars, they're driving out. And I'm still not even starting the run and they're going to breakfast or lunch or whatever. Demoralizing the whole time. There's no... And looking ahead, thinking everybody else has got this thing figured out.

I know, I know, I know there's a tendency for some to think—as we talk about marriage, parenting, singleness, this or that—to think, "Man, these other people are so far ahead. Because of past mistakes, because of this or that, who knows what? I just don't even know how to get caught up." And I want you to know... I want you to know that you are not alone. And the strength to fight for your marriage, the strength to fight for your children, the strength to thrive in your singleness, the strength to be a man or a woman—God your Father is with you. The God who moves mountains. He has put His Spirit in you to lead you and guide you. And He loves you and He understands you and He forgives you. Don't be hampered by past failure. He forgives you and He walks with you. He disciplines, yes, but He leads us for our good. This is what it means for Him to be our Father.

We are His Children

What We Have...

God is our Father. We are His children. Now I'm going to go quickly through these, real quickly. What we have, what we do and what we anticipate. First, what we have. As His children, we have a new name. Have a new name. Obviously we don't have time to turn all these places, but John 1 says, "*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*" (John 1:12). Have a new name; we bear His name as His children.

We have a new spirit. I've already addressed this, Romans 8:16, "*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*." New name, new spirit, new brothers and sisters. All throughout the New Testament we're addressed as brothers and sisters. In this local church alongside other local churches.

Oh, if you haven't looked at it, go online, rotating feature on our website to the Brook Hills global blog. We've got teams going literally around the world this summer and you can follow along with what our brothers and sisters are doing in different parts of the world all summer long. You go on there... At least yesterday, the first entry at the top. So all these different teams... We've had teams in Macedonia this last week, two teams in India reporting back. You go on right now and you'll see at the top... You'll see one of our elders, Dale Kendrick, sweating profusely in India. And he is standing next to this woman in this previously unreached village and he says, "Brook Hills faith family, I want to introduce you to our new sister in Christ who has just trusted in Christ for her salvation." And he says that. He says, "This is our new sister." And she is. That's what it means. She's our sister, our new sister. So rejoice in this. New brothers and sisters.

We have access to the Father's presence. Oh so much here. Remember Exodus 19? God revealing Himself as a consuming fire on the mountain? The command to stay away from the mountain...stay away from the holy presence of God. And then you see in Christ everything changed. Hebrews 4:14-16, we have confidence to enter the throne of God. Confidence to come before God. We are not afraid of God in some unhealthy way. Not afraid of God. We are now friends of God. Friends of God. Romans 8 says, "*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'*" (Romans 8:15).

Not afraid, friends of God, welcome in the presence of God, access to His presence, and we have an inheritance in the Father's kingdom. "*The Spirit Himself bears witness,*" Romans 8:16-17, "*that we are children of God, and if children [check this out], then heirs—heirs of*

God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Oh, brothers and sisters, children of God, be free from the pursuit of pleasures and possessions and plaudits in this world. You have a Father in Heaven who gives you a kingdom forever. It would make no sense to spend our lives running after the nicer car, bigger house, better stuff, better position here when we have billions of years of a kingdom waiting for us from our Father in Heaven. We have an inheritance in the Father's kingdom.

What We Do...

So what we do, we worship Him. That's the whole point of Matthew 6:9, "...*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*" Make your name known. It's holy. Hallowed in all the earth. We worship Him. We glorify Him, Matthew 5:16, "*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*" That's... Oh when you wake up tomorrow morning say, "Yes! What I want to do today is live before my family, before friends, before coworkers. I want to live in a way that people see my life and glorify my Father." Glorify Him.

We imitate Him. Ephesians 5:1 says, "*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.*" We obey Him. First John 3:10 says, "*By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*" You want to tell who the children of God are? Look at their lives. They're obeying Him.

We reflect Him. This is what we talked about earlier. Remember, this is why we adopt. This is why we do foster care. Not because we're just altruistic people. We don't adopt because we just want nice Christmas card photos to send out that are...people will think are cute. That doesn't drive ministry to orphans. What drives ministry to orphans is gospel-driven tenacity that knows when there are difficulties in foster care and adoption, when there are challenges, when there is resistance. Even from children who don't have a mom or a dad but who have grown up in a context where they have learned to resist any effort at love toward them.

Well how do you press in? How do you press in in those circumstances? You know that there was once a day when we were rebels against God and everything in us turned away from Him and He pursued us with His love. He called us into His family. He made us His sons and His daughters and that's what drives us; not altruism. Not this or that. We care for orphans not because we are rescuers. We're not some good...a group of good altruistic people out to be savior for orphans around the world. That's not what drives orphan ministry. We're not rescuers, brothers and sisters. We care for orphans because we are the rescued. That's why we care for 143, 147 million orphans in the world.

All this brings back to us, so you look at it. What does it mean for God to be our Father? You look on your page there. What does it mean for us to be His children? Don't we want everybody to know God as Father? We want people to know God as Father. This is what drives us as men and women, husbands and wives, parents and singles together, to pass the gospel on to the next generation because we want the next generation to be counted among the sons and daughters of God. Now and forever. More than anything, we want people to experience the joy of being children of the heavenly Father.

What We Anticipate...

And what we anticipate. Oh we don't have time to turn there. Revelation 21:1-7, There is coming a day when "*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things*

have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). Then listen to verse seven. Revelation 21:7, “The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”

That’s the picture of Heaven. A heritage where He will be our God and we will be His son, His children. And so as children of God the Father, I invite you to look forward to a day when there will be no more pain. Brothers and sisters, there will be no more pain in your heart, in your body, in your relationships. Father’s Day, always a tender day for me missing my dad. But there is coming a day when there will be no more pain. It will all be gone. And we’re looking forward to an eternity where we will enjoy His presence. He will be our God. We will be His sons, daughters forever and ever and ever and ever.

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