

Celebrating the Fatherhood of God

June 20, 2010

INTRODUCTION

In his 20th Century Christian classic *Knowing God*, Puritan scholar and reformed theologian J.I. Packer writes...

“You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one’s holy Father. If you want to judge 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.” (p.182)

From very beginning of the biblical story, God has not simply been intent on revealing Himself as divine Creator, gracious Redeemer, and righteous and holy Judge. Yes, God is each of these things. But, God is more.

The revelation of God in the Bible is also a story of God as a loving and faithful Father who is passionate for His children. In the biblical story, we see God revealing Himself as a father who loves, protects, nurtures, provides, warns, saves, adopts, and disciplines His children.

For many people, the storyline of God’s fatherhood doesn’t leap off the Bible’s pages like the storylines of creation, redemption, and judgment. Why? Well, honestly, it’s because so many people have had a negative experience with an earthly father.

I read a great quote this week.

“A child is not likely to find a father in God unless he finds something of God in his father.”

Many of you here today had an earthly father who displayed, imperfectly albeit, something of God. If so, pondering and celebrating the fatherhood of God is fairly easy.

Unfortunately, there are also those here this morning that didn't find anything of God in their earthly father. If this was your childhood, pondering and celebrating the fatherhood of God is far more difficult.

Furthermore, some of you are here today and Father's Day is bittersweet. It's bittersweet because your father, in whom you found something of God, is no longer living.

Whether or not you found something of God in your earthly father, there is reason to celebrate Father's Day. Whether your earthly father is alive or deceased, there is reason to celebrate Father's Day. How so, you might ask? Simple! God is not simply the Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. God is also the loving, gracious, merciful, and faithful Father we all long for.

EXEGESIS

This morning, with the help of the Holy Spirit, God wants to help you celebrate His glorious fatherhood. As we look at God's fatherhood in scripture, my hope is that you will be profoundly encouraged by who your great and awesome God really is.

In the same vain, I also hope that every father here today will be profoundly challenged by the example God has set before us and called us to model before our children. What a great privilege every Christian father has to introduce and teach his children about the glorious and faithful fatherhood of God.

In particular, I want to highlight four attributes of God's fatherhood as presented to us throughout Scripture.

The Delight of God the Father in His Creation

This week, my littlest girl, Blythe, jumped in my lap and asked me if I liked her outfit for the day. Caroline, my oldest daughter, had just dressed Blythe and put braided pigtails in her hair. Blythe looked beautiful. Of course, I'm a sucker for pigtails. There's just something about a little girl in pigtails that melts my heart.

Anyways...

So, I looked at my sweet little girl and asked her – *“Who made you so beautiful, Blythe?”* Blythe quickly responded, *“Caroline did!”* I laughed! This wasn't the answer I was looking for. I asked her again, this time with some spiritual inflection in my voice – *“Nooooo...WHO made you so beautiful, Blythe?”* *“God did!”* There we go, that's the answer I was searching for.

As the father of three precious girls, one of my goals is to constantly teach and remind them of the glorious truth that their beauty (inward and outward) and significance are to be discovered, grounded, and celebrated in God the Father – the Divine Sculptor of life.

Listen carefully to the prophet Isaiah...

“But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our Potter; we are all the work of your hand.” (Isaiah 64:8)

Now, consider the words of the Psalmist who writes...

“For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows them very well.” (Psalm 139:13-14)

You are no accident!

Your Heavenly Father, the Master Potter, placed His omnipotent hands on your unformed, lifeless clay and sculpted you into a one-of-a-kind masterpiece created specifically to bring Him glory, pleasure, and delight. There is nothing ordinary about you. There is nothing average about you.

Do you believe you are fearfully and wonderfully made by the Sovereign Creator? Do you look in the mirror and celebrate like the Psalmist, knowing that you represent the “wonderful works” of your Father’s sovereign and creative genius?

Since God created the first man, Adam, no one since has ever been sculpted quite like God sculpted you. You are a masterpiece created by the Master Potter. The color of your eyes, the shape of your body, your personality, along with your skills, talents, and spiritual gifts – these were all **sovereignly** and **perfectly** grafted into your DNA by the very God who spoke creation into existence.

This God I speak of is not just the transcendent, holy God who resides light years away in the glory and splendor of Heaven. He is also the imminent, loving, gracious, and passionate Father who, thru the sacrifice of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, adopted you into his family when sin had rendered you eternally orphaned.

- ⇒ Maybe you grew up without an earthly father in your life?
- ⇒ Maybe you grew up with a Father who always highlighted your flaws rather than your strengths?
- ⇒ Maybe you grew up with a Father who always saw the one “B” on your report card rather than the four “A’s”?
- ⇒ Maybe you grew up with a father who never said, *“Sweetie, you look beautiful today!”*
- ⇒ Maybe you grew up with a father who rarely, if ever said, *“Son, you’re awesome and I love you!”*

If so, more than likely, you have lived much of your life struggling to believe that God Almighty, your heavenly Father, delights in you, believes in you, loves you, and sees you as a spectacular and beautiful creation birthed from His creative genius. This must change!

God's Word is clear!

Thru Christ, you have a heavenly Father who purposefully created you for His delight and pleasure. You my friend, no matter where you've been, what you've done, or what you have for so long believed you lack, thru faith in Jesus Christ, are priceless, beautiful, and eternally significant in the eyes of God the Father.

Today, you may not have an earthly father to celebrate. But, rest assured of this, you have a heavenly Father who is more than worthy of your praise, adoration, and worship. You have a Father who loves you, delights in you, and looks upon you with eyes that see a masterpiece.

You are your heavenly Father's masterpiece! Believe it!

Father's, one of our great privileges and callings is to teach our children to discover their significance, value, and beauty in the person and work of the triune God – God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We must be men who affirm the uniqueness of our children.

We must be men who teach our daughters to look in the mirror and say with the Psalmist, *"I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; I know them well."*

We must be men who celebrate God's sovereign design of our children instead of trying to change their personalities and conform their interests to our own.

Father's, are you affirming the Master Potter's glorious and unique design of your children? **Are you teaching your children to define their significance, value, and beauty in the creative genius of God – not the world?**

The Comfort & Mercy of God the Father

One of the great joys of my life is watching my 8-year old son, Brandt, play flag football. This past fall, Brandt was the starting quarterback on his team. In the backfield were two tailbacks with blazing speed and truly amazing quickness. Brandt's job was simple; don't screw things up. Call out the cadence, take the snap, and hand the ball off to one the two Ferrari's in the backfield. The rest was pretty much history. Brandt's team made it to the championship game, where they struggled valiantly against another team with a backfield full of Ferrari's. In the end, Brandt's team came up short.

At Brandt's age, as a father, I'm far more interested in Brandt's effort, attitude, and sportsmanship than his passer rating, touchdowns, or tackles. Being like his daddy, which means he's highly competitive, I watched with great interest how Brandt handled the championship loss. Would he display good sportsmanship? Would he hold his head high, knowing that he gave 100% on the field? Would he shake the hands of the opposing team and tell them, "*Congratulations!*"

I'm proud to say that Brandt handled himself in a way that made me very proud as a father.

After one final pep talk from their coach, the team huddle dispersed for the final time and each boy found his parents. I caught Brandt's eye as the huddle broke and I could tell that he was barely holding it together. As he got closer to me, the disappointment of the loss became more visible. By the time he reached me, the tears were flowing as he buried his face in my chest. My little warrior was heart-broken. It didn't matter that he'd scored a 50-yard touchdown. It didn't matter that he'd sacked the quarterback four times. He wanted his team to win the championship and they didn't.

As Brandt buried his tearful face in my chest, I realized what a privilege he was giving me. At that moment, Brandt was seeking my comfort as his daddy and that's exactly what I gave him. In his time of sadness and disappointment, he needed his daddy's assuring embrace and comforting words.

What a privilege it is to be a father and give comfort to our children. I'm sure that won't be the last time Brandt loses, fails, or sins. I know this; I will be waiting for him with open arms. One of my great callings as a father is to bless my children with mercy and comfort when life presents disappointment, pain, and failure.

Such fatherly love is but a mere glimpse of the perfect love God the Father has for His children. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, the Apostle Paul writes...

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction...”

Did you hear that most glorious phrase – “...*the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort...*”?

Are you in need of fatherly mercy? Is their sin in your life that has you shackled to guilt? Is there an addiction or habit that is weighing you down under its crushing yoke? Run to your heavenly Father like Brandt ran to me. Know and trust that what you will find in the arms of God the Father is mercy. Does not the Bible teach us that our heavenly Father is “*rich in mercy*”? ([Eph. 2:4](#)) Are we not taught that the mercies of our heavenly Father “*never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is His faithfulness*”? ([Lam. 3:22-23](#))

Are you in need of fatherly comfort? Has your heart been broken by an unfaithful spouse or a failed business venture? Are you mourning the loss of someone you loved dearly – a father, a friend, a coworker, a spouse? Has a rebellious teenager left you feeling helpless and ashamed? Run to your heavenly Father like Brandt ran to me. Your Father in heaven is the God of *all* comforts. He sees your tears, your heartache, and your brokenness and He longs to comfort you as only He can.

Today, you may not have an earthly father to celebrate. But, rest assured of this, you have a heavenly Father who is more than worthy of your praise, adoration, and worship. You have a Father who is rich in mercy and is the God of all comfort.

Father's, another great privilege and calling we have is to display the mercy and comfort of our Heavenly Father to our children.

Do your children know you to be a father of mercy and comfort? When your children fall short of your expectations and God's expectations, do they run into your arms knowing they will find unconditional love, mercy, and comfort as they wrestle with their failures and their sins? Or, do they hide out of fear of judgment and scorn?

Men, if we desire for our children to run to God the Father when they sin and fall short of the glory of God (which they most definitely will), they must know they can find comfort and mercy in the arms of their earthly father. This doesn't mean we don't discipline. Nor does it mean that we turn a blind eye to the consequences of their actions and sins. What it does mean is that we comfort first. It means we consider how God has lavishly displayed His mercy toward us. It means that we discipline out of love and mercy, not out of anger and justice.

The Consistency & Faithfulness of God the Father

When I first became a father, I had a memorable conversation with my dad. My conversation was based primarily on a simple, but important question – *“What's the key to great parenting?”*

His answer was one I have never forgotten, but often fail to live out - *“Son, be consistent with your children. Your children will test you daily. They will push you to the edge. Don't abdicate your role. Don't give in. **BE CONSISTENT!**“*

Boy, was my dad ever right!

Now, as a father of four, I have a far deeper appreciation for my father's words. My children test me every day. And, although I have failed countless times, I have witnessed the power of consistent love in the lives of my children. My dad was spot on! Children thrive in an environment where consistent love, grace, and discipline are present.

There's only one problem with my father's sage advice. I'm sinful! Because I'm sinful, I'm terribly inconsistent at times. More than likely, you are inconsistent too.

Acclaimed British author, Aldous Huxley, most famously known for his book *A Brave New World*, once wrote,

“Consistency is contrary to nature, contrary to life. The only completely consistent people are the dead.”

There's a lot of truth to this humorous statement, isn't there?

If we were honest with each other, we would quickly admit that we are prone to change our “tune” quite frequently. The tune we whistle tends to change often, doesn't it?

You see, by nature, we are people who vacillate on a wide foray of issues – politics, relationships, theology, values, morals, and even parenting. Our tendency to vacillate is influenced in large part by our self-centered pursuit of what makes us comfortable and happy at the moment. It is our preference for the “path of least resistance” that leads us down the destructive “path of compromise.”

Let's face it! We are “in the moment” people. Sometimes, the easiest and most popular thing to do is to change our tune and compromise. This is true in our politics, our relationships, our theology, our morals, and our parenting too. Unfortunately, the sobering irony is that compromising consistency, whether it's our ethics, morals, theology, or parenting, ends up costing us (and others) far more than we ever bargained for.

Guess what?

In the face of this sobering reality that we are by nature inconsistent friends, spouses, leaders, and parents, the Bible reminds us that our Heavenly Father is immutable. Our Heavenly Father is unchanging. Our Heavenly Father is perfectly consistent. He never vacillates. He never gives up. He never abdicates His role to passionately, faithfully, and

fiercely parent us as His adopted children. Our Heavenly Father's love, grace, mercy, and discipline are *never* inconsistent.

In James 1:16-17, the half-brother of Jesus Christ exhorts his Jewish listeners with these words, ***“Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”***

There you have it!

The Father of lights, our Merciful and Gracious Heavenly Father, who commands the stars and holds them in place, does not change. (Isa. 40:26) His character doesn't change. His love doesn't change. His holiness doesn't change. His passion for His glory never changes. His unwavering pursuit, thru Christ, to redeem wretched and wicked sinners never changes. His commitment to lovingly discipline His children never changes. (Heb. 12:5-11) His commitment to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness never changes. (1 John 1:9) His commitment to keep us from stumbling and to present us blameless before the presence of His glory never changes. (Jude 24-25)

This week, you may not have an earthly father to celebrate. Maybe you grew up with an inconsistent father who constantly changed his tune. From one day to the next, you never knew what you were going to get when dad walked thru the door. On any given day, your dad might be gracious or wrathful. He might be patient or impatient. He might be available or unavailable. He might be happy or angry. He might be gentle or harsh. His discipline might be fair or unfair.

If so, rest assured of this, you have a heavenly Father who is more than worthy of your praise, adoration, and worship. You have a Heavenly Father whose very character never changes. His love for you, His grace toward you, His passion and desire for you, and His discipline of you is constant, fair, and perfect.

Every morning when you awake, you can know without any doubt exactly what you're going to receive from your Heavenly Father that day – a holy and consistent love, grace, mercy, passion, and discipline of you who are none other than His precious and priceless adopted child.

What an amazing Heavenly Father we have!

Fathers, here we have another great privilege and calling. Our children need fathers who are consistent. Our children need fathers who love them consistently, disciple them consistently, make themselves available to them consistently, and discipline them consistently.

Our Heavenly Father is consistent. If our children are to know God as their Heavenly Father who never wavers, never abdicates His role, never gives up on his love, never reneges on a promise, then we must be men who consistently love our wives like Christ loved the Church. We must also be men who consistently love, lead, nurture, and discipline our children in the ways of the Lord.

How about it, dads? Are we fathers who consistently love our children? **Are our lives pointing our children to the consistent and faithful love of God the Father?**

The Sacrificial Love of God the Father

Let me ask you a question, *“What’s the greatest sacrifice another person has ever made on your behalf?”*

Bone marrow transplant? A personal loan that depleted a savings account? A dream job turned down in preference for a stable marriage and home? A single mother who worked two jobs so that you could get the best education possible? The possibilities are endless, aren't they?

In the case of my amazing parents, I'm convinced they made countless sacrifices – significant sacrifices at that – which I will never know about or fully appreciate. But, there's one sacrifice that quickly comes to mind. It comes to mind for the sheer fact that I was old enough to remember it and stand in awe of it.

In the summer of 1989, my parents moved from Winston-Salem, NC to Columbia, SC. At the time, I was a rising junior at Liberty University and my brother Will was a rising freshman at NC State. Our littlest brother, Mark, was a rising 10th grader who was slated to go to Irmo High School. Some of you can sympathize with Mark's plight. Moving as a 10th grader is not easy. Mark is the smartest of the three Toburen boys, so academically speaking, the transition was an easy one. However, what many people don't know is that at the time of this move, Mark was one the fastest AAU swimmers in the *country*. His swimming future was extremely bright.

Leaving the Winston-Salem YMCA for a new team and a new coach proved to be very tough for Mark. So tough in fact, my parents made one of the toughest and most sacrificial decisions of their parenting life. Close family friends living in Winston-Salem offered to have Mark live with them so that he could return to the Winston-Salem YMCA and train with his former coach. The Ramey family had a son Mark's age who happened to swim as well. After praying and agonizing over this decision for months, my parents chose to let Mark return to Winston-Salem and chase his swimming dreams. The sacrifice was significant.

In order for Mark to have the best chance of realizing his dreams to swim collegiately, my parents had to sacrifice the privilege of parenting Mark during his junior and senior years of high school. My parents loved their son so much, they were willing to let go of him two years premature. They were willing to put their son's interests ahead of their own.

Now, I know there will be some who question such judgment. Fair enough! Hindsight is always 20/20. But, here's what I know. My parents were willing to sacrifice much for their son's future. I'm not sure I could make such a sacrifice.

In Galatians 1:3-4, the Apostle Paul writes...

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”

Did you catch the magnitude of this verse?

This verse is about the ultimate sacrifice – the heavenly Father sacrificing his only Son for enemies of His kingdom. Think of it this way. From the moment Adam and Eve rebelled against God and imputed sin and death to the human race, God’s sovereign plan was to sacrifice His beloved Son Jesus to provide forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life.

In His divine foreknowledge, God the Father knew that humanity would fall prey to Satan’s deception, succumb to sin, rebel against His holiness, and thus become His enemy. God the Father knew that we would commit heinous sins of idolatry, greed, violence, and immorality. God the Father knew that we would become hostile towards His holiness. (Col. 1:21) God the Father knew that we would chase after the “prince of the power of the air.” (Eph. 2:2)

Yet, the will of our merciful and compassionate Father was not to condemn us. His will was not to unleash the holy fury of His wrath against us. No!

The will of God the Father was to sacrifice His only begotten Son for our sin. (John 3:16) The will of God the Father was to send His Son to be a propitiation for our sin. (1 John 4:10) The will of God the Father was that His sinless Son would become our sin so that we, thru Christ, might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21) The will of God the Father was to justify us thru the blood of Christ. (Rom. 5:9) The will of God the Father was to deliver us from this present evil age; an age where our enemy Satan prowls like a roaring lion looking for souls to devour and eternally destroy. (1 Peter 5:8)

The will of God the Father was to give up His Son so that you might possess a glorious, eternal future in heaven where an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading is waiting for you. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

This week, you may not have an earthly father to celebrate. Maybe you grew up with a selfish father who only thought of himself and his own interests, wants, and hobbies. If so, rest assured of this, you have a heavenly Father who is more than worthy of your praise, adoration, and worship. You have a Father who sacrificed His Son for your future.

Look to the cross and there you will see the amazing love of the Heavenly Father; a Father who willingly crushed His Son (Isa. 53:10) and nailed Him to the cross (Col. 2:13-14) so that you might know Him, be known by Him, and experience His all-consuming glory, love, and peace.

I'm thankful for parents who made significant financial, relational, and time sacrifices for my future wellbeing – as well as the wellbeing of my siblings. But, I'm overwhelmingly and profoundly grateful for the sacrifice my Heavenly Father made for my eternal future – a future predestined for the glory and splendor of heaven. A future secured on the cross of Calvary – a bloody instrument of suffering and death.

What an amazing Father we have!

Father's, here's the final privilege and challenge for us today. If we are to point our children to the all-consuming love of God the Father, we must be men of sacrifice. We must be men like our Savior Jesus who willingly and joyfully gave up his life so that we might have life. We must be men who joyfully take up our crosses and follow Christ. We must be men who are willing to sacrifice our own interests, hobbies, time, and resources for the eternal future of our children.

Don't miss this, men! Our sacrifice should be driven by the eternal destination of our children's souls. God sacrificed His only begotten Son because He was passionate for the salvation of our souls.

Are you a man of sacrifice? Are you willingly and joyfully taking up your cross, denying yourself, and emptying yourself for the sake of your child's soul?

Becoming a godly father means that we take our cue from our Heavenly Father. It means that we parent the way God father's us.

God the Father...

- ⇒ Celebrates and affirms our unique personhood, taking great delight in who He fearfully and wonderfully made us to be. Every one of us is a masterpiece!
- ⇒ Extends us great mercy and comfort in our countless times of failure, sin, and rebellion. His discipline in these times is driven by love, not anger and justice.
- ⇒ Consistently and faithfully loves, nurtures, and disciplines us. God's love for us never wavers – never!
- ⇒ Sacrificed His Son Jesus Christ out of His great passion for His glory and the eternal destination of our souls.

What an amazing and glorious Heavenly Father we have. Regardless of your experience with an earthly father, if you belong to God thru faith in Christ, you have a heavenly Father who loves you, delights in you, and cares for you more than you can begin to comprehend. Make no mistake about it; as adopted children of the holy God, we have much to celebrate this Father's Day.

Men, God has set before us His way of fatherhood. Will we, as Christian fathers, live and parent in such a way that our children find something of God in us? Our children discovering the fatherhood of God thru our lives is one the greatest gifts a father can give his children.