

Our Father: Celebrating the Fatherhood of God

Father's Day 2016 | Selected Scriptures

Southern Hills Baptist Church

June 19, 2016

INTRODUCTION

If you have your Bibles go ahead and open up to Romans 8. We will be there momentarily.

Welcome and Happy Father's Day. I hope the Father's here have had a wonderful day with loved ones. And I hope everyone has had a great day celebrating their father or the memory of their father.

12th Anniversary!

In addition to being Father's Day, Rachel and I are celebrating our 12th anniversary. I married Rachel when I was 22, she was 21, we were kids. Aside from entrusting my life and eternity to Jesus, it was the best decision I could have ever made.

- She lovingly pushes me to be more like Jesus and to pick up the slack where I am lazy and taking my eyes off Christ.
- She loves me despite all of my failings and is far more patient with me than I deserve.
- She has a heart to serve and love others.
- She works harder than anyone I know.

I couldn't imagine doing life without her and thankfully I don't have to. She is evidence of God's incredible grace in my life. How else could I explain marrying up the way I did? Grace is the only answer. It is the only answer to so many of the questions of my life and it is certainly the explanation of my marriage.

Ok, that was a rabbit trail I wasn't going to pass up as my wife deserves every word I uttered and many, many more. Let us however, transition back to our Father's Day theme.

The Greatest Father

Father's Day is a day meant to celebrate and remember the wonderful Fathers in our lives. There is no greater Father than that of our Heavenly Father so I want to take time tonight and consider God as our Heavenly Father.

- I want to consider what it means to have God as our Father.
- I want to consider what this reveals about who God is.
- I want to consider how who we are is shaped by having God as our Father.

As we consider all of this I want to celebrate it because having God as our Father is the best of news!

Jesus' Use of "Father"

The topic of the Fatherhood of God carries with it far greater significance than merely being a convenient cross over topic on Father's Day. **Father was the primary title that Jesus used when speaking of God.** This is noteworthy as the **Old Testament only records 15 occurrences** of God being referred to as Father. However, this all takes a dramatic shift when Jesus comes on the scene. **Jesus refers to God as Father over 165 times throughout the 4 Gospels**, with over 100 of those occurrences coming in the Gospel of John.

Important to Jesus = Important to Us

Now, if this was Jesus' preferred way to speak of God we have to know it is an important image of God we should get to know well, right? **There is no one who knows God better than Jesus as they are one and the One who knows God best, Jesus, uses "Father" as the primary title with which He addresses God.** There is no question the God's title of Father is one we have to know, understand, and embrace.

Packer: Understanding God's Fatherhood = Christianity

Listen to how J.I. Packer speaks to the significance of God as Father in his modern-day classic, "Knowing God"...

"What is a Christian? 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."

-J.I. Packer, "Knowing God"

Wow! That is a strong statement on the Fatherhood of God, a strong statement that is full of truth. Our identity as Christians, in large part, flows out of an understanding of who we are as children of God.

Knowing who God is as your Father is central to understanding who you are as a Christian and it is something that should fill you with great joy, unshakable hope, and rock-solid security.

Roadmap

With all of that said, I want to look at 5 different passages of Scripture tonight that speak to God as our Father and drink from this deep well, learning what it means for God to be our Father. We of course can't capture all that it means for God to be our Father in a single hour tonight, but these 5 passages provide a great launching point as we celebrate our Heavenly Father on this Father's Day.

Let's open up in prayer...

Father, what a joy it is to call you Father. This title is one of intimacy. It is one that communicates your intense love. It is a title that reveals that you have our best interests at heart. God, reveal yourself to us tonight through your Word. Open the eyes of our hearts that we may see you clearly. God may we love you more after this study. Fill us with the all-satisfying joy of knowing you as Father. We pray these things in your Son's holy name. Amen.

Again, we are going to take a look at 5 different passages, or maybe more accurately said, we are going to look at 5 primary passages that give us insight into what it means for God to be our Father.

OUR FATHER...

1. GRACIOUSLY ADOPTS (Rom 8:12-17)

The first thing that we see about God as our Heavenly Father is that He graciously adopts. This is an important place to start as it speaks to how we enter into this Father-Child relationship with God and become part of His family. Listen to what Paul writes in Romans 8, starting in verse 12...

Romans 8:12-17

[12] So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. [13] For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. [14] For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. [15] 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!” [16] The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, 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.

Passage Overview

This is an incredibly powerful passage of Scripture and it tells us a lot about who God is as our Father. Paul’s main thrust in this passage is to call the Roman believers to live lives of holiness. They are no longer debtors to the flesh or to sin. They were once slaves to sin, but that is no longer the case, they have been set free from the deadly slave master of sin. Rather they have been given the Spirit of Adoption as sons and daughters of God. It is this Spirit that causes us to cry out, saying, “**Abba,**” **which is Aramaic for “Dada.” It is the name for father that a toddler would babble. It is the name that my 5 year old uses when she wants to invoke a sense of intimacy.** It is this freedom from sin and adoption into the family of God that provides the freeing power to live lives of holiness as Paul is calling for here.

Dada – Title of Intimacy and Love

I want us to focus in though on what Paul is teaching us about God as father. Paul uses this specific vocabulary of “Abba” to speak to the intimate relationship that we have with God. **God is not a distant Father who is all work, all business, and no tenderness or gentle care. No!** God the Father is a Father who loves His children and has a close and intimate relationship with them.

Adoption Overview

Now, what I want point out in this passage is that God adopted us into His family. I believe we are all familiar with what adoption is, right?

- Adoption is the action taking legal guardianship of a child of other parents.
- Adoption is the making the commitment of full time responsibility for a child that isn’t biologically your own, but committing to love and rearing them as if they were your own.

Our Messy Adoption – Children of Wrath

Generally adoption becomes necessary for a child when they don’t have a home, when they don’t have parents who are able or maybe who are not willing to care for them. **Brothers and Sisters, our situation was far worse. We were not simply an innocent children who needed a loving home to care for us.** Our passage alludes to this. We were debtors to the flesh or sin. Paul tells us elsewhere that...

- We were active **enemies** against God.
- We were **rebels**.
- We were **traitors**.
- We were **working against God** as we lived for our own glory, rather than God’s.
- We were **children of wrath**.

Imagine God’s Situation: The Murder of Your Son

Now, put yourself in God’s shoes for a moment. Imagine you had a son you loved with all you had. Your Son was the delight of your heart. Then one day an orphaned classmate of your son’s violently murdered him. He had done nothing wrong. He was senselessly killed as the overflow of a heart full of evil. How would you feel towards the kid who took what you loved most?

- Could you stomach the site of him?
- Could you accept an apology?

- Would you ever be interested in having him over for dinner?
- Could you even imagine adopting him into your own family and calling him your son?

I would imagine not.

We Killed God's Son!

Here is the thing though... **it was our sin that killed Jesus. It was our evil that took Jesus to the cross.** We have all proudly sinned before and against the holy God of the Universe. We have betrayed our Creator. We were the enemies.

What Did God Do? Graciously Adopted

And how has God responded to us? He gave up His Son so that we might be adopted into His family. **God has done the unthinkable. He has taken enemies and made them sons and daughters!** The only explanation for such an act is grace. God has given us what we didn't deserve, entrance into the family of God. It is literally unthinkable. Who would ever do such a thing? God's grace towards us is immeasurably great.

Jesus' Summation: Mercy

Jesus captures this well in Luke 6 when He says...

Luke 6:35-36

[35] But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

[36] Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful

God has loved His enemies! I am proof of that.

God has been kind to the ungrateful. You are proof of that.

God is merciful, so very, very merciful. His grace knows no bounds! **That is the story of our adoption into His family! It is a story of unthinkable grace that reaches further than we could ever imagine!**

Application – Finding Identity in God the Father

So what does this mean for us?

Celebrating Our Father's Grace

Firstly, can we just stop and celebrate our Heavenly Father for just a moment? Our Father overflows with grace towards us. In the words of David Crowder, God's grace is an ocean and we are all sinking. **This shouldn't be news to you if you worship with us regularly, but it is news that never grows old.** There is so much hope in this truth about God the Father.

It is so easy to examine ourselves and see how far short we fall of who we have been called to be by God and even who we want to be ourselves. We have all failed in so many ways. And God knows it. Understand this...

- God knows all of our sins, struggles, faults, and failures
- He knows all of the ugly moments that we try to hide from others
- He knows all of the dark thoughts that we have had that we would never dare share with anyone else

- He knows about the sin in your life that you can't seem to shake
- He knows about the pet sin you keep in secret from the sight of others
- He knows it all...

And even with all of this knowledge God sent Jesus, His one and only Son, to die a brutal death He did not deserve, and to take the punishment that we deserved, the righteous wrath of God, all so He could adopt us into His family!!! He desired to adopt the ugly mess that was us! This truth is humbling and staggering. **This is our Heavenly Father!** I am proud to call Him my Father and more than that I know that I need to, for apart from Him I am hopeless. Take a moment and just savor the greatness of Our Father!

We are Products of Grace

Secondly, we all need to remember that we are products of grace, right? We are children of God, not because we were wise, not because we were more righteous, not because we figured life out, No! None of that. We are children of God because of grace. Because God the Father loved a bunch of unlovely people in an unthinkable, self-sacrificing way.

God Loves Us Because He Loves Us

This tells us something amazing about God's love for His children. It runs far deeper than we will ever understand. **His love will never ebb and flow with our ups and downs, with our sins and righteous deeds.** The best way I know how to say it is that **God loves us because He loves us.** Listen to how Moses says it in Deuteronomy 7...

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

[7] It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, [8] but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Moses says God loves you not because of your great number, but rather He loves you because He loves you. **This is amazing to me and it gives me such great security. If God's love were dependent upon me towing the line or following the rules I would have messed it up day one.** As God's child I never have to fear God showing me the door or revoking my title as son. I never have to fear these things because I was adopted into God's family based on God's love and faithfulness, not my own.

What a Joy!!!

What a joy it is to be a son or daughter of God! We have so much to be thankful for! I pray your heart is filled with an intense love for your Heavenly Father as we consider His gracious adoption of us into His family!

Let's continue looking in the Scriptures for portraits of our Heavenly Father. The next passage that we are going to look at reminds us that Our Father...

GENEROUSLY PROVIDES (Matt 7:7-11)

Listen to how Jesus describes our Heavenly Father in Matthew 7...

Matthew 7:7-11

[7] “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [8] For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. [9] Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? [10] Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? [11] 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!

God’s Fatherhood: Instilling Confidence in Prayer

So these words from Jesus are given to us in His most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus is encouraging His followers to pray and to go to God, their Heavenly Father, with their requests. He wants to **instill confidence in His audience that God not only hears their prayers, but desires to answer them**. To help them understand God and their prayers Jesus uses the picture of a Father and uses an argument from the lesser to the greater.

Father’s Want Good for their Kids / My Youth

Jesus points out that fathers want good for their kids. Fathers enjoy giving their kids good gifts. I remember a time in my life before Rachel and I had Avery. Kids were still a few years away for us, but occasionally we would watch kids for our friends to help out. I always thought it was really funny to talk to young kids like they were adults. I liked to ask them questions about the grind of the 9-5 they were working. I liked to ask them if they were setting aside any of their allowance for retirement and if they preferred a traditional 401k or Roth 401k. Often this would perplex these little kids I found great amusement in this. Their confusion usually led to question and I thought it was funny to give them skewed answers and confuse them further. I was young. I was dumb.

My Growth as a Father

Rachel would often say, “I am so concerned for our kids. They are going to be so confused and backwards by the time Thomas is done with them.” I thought that would be one of the joys of fatherhood. Then we had Avery and all of my silly antics went out the window. The games I once played with kids are things I never wanted to do to my own kids. I wanted the best for Avery and now Addy, and soon Aubrey. My own personal amusement was no longer what my heart wanted. I wanted to see my girls be cared for and set up for success. I want good for them.

Basic Fact: Fathers Want Good for their Kids

I think this is inherently true of virtually all fathers. The love that you have for your kids drives you to provide for them and care for them. It is this intense love and desire to see your kids set up for success that will lead you to go out of your way to provide for them with long hours at work and patient instruction at home. This is what Jesus points out in this teaching. If a child asks his father for food, for provision, he wouldn’t give his child something that could bring harm or would neglect their need.

If Imperfect Dads Love Kids and God is Better...

So the question that Jesus asks is, **if this is true of fathers like you and me who still struggle with sin, who are selfish at times, who are proud, who are short-sighted, and who have limited resources, how much more true is it of God** who is perfect in His love and wisdom and who has limitless resources?

Our Heavenly Father wants the best for us and He has the power to deliver it to us. God the Father will provide for us

Application – Finding Identity in God the Father

Can we stop and celebrate this reality for just a moment? God wants the best for you! He wants you to bring your needs to Him so that He can meet them! This is a mind-boggling reality. God loves you in this way! Would there be any better person to have your back in this way? What if the richest man in the world called you and gave you this message? What if Bill Gates came to your house and said, "I want you to be a part of my family and I am going to take care of you every step of the way. I want to do everything in my power, which humanly is substantial, to set you up for success in life." How would you feel about that? Would you feel empowered, a bit invincible maybe?

God's Fatherhood is Better

God's Fatherhood is better. He knows you better. He knows what you need more fully. Now, understand this, what you need isn't always what you want or what you expect, just like the way I provide for my girls isn't always what they want, but it is for their good. My girls hate getting shots, but as their father I know they need them so that is what they get. God's Fatherly provision works in the same way and He is always there for us, a promise no earthly father can make.

God's Fault?

You may hear this and say, "So, Thomas, what you are saying is that the stresses I do have in life, when things don't go my way or play out as I had been hoping, those stresses, those disappointments, that heartache is from God?"

Wanting Something God Doesn't Want For You

To answer that question, yes and no. Yes the God is sovereign over the circumstances so He is responsible for those, however the heartache you experience, the disappointment you feel could be that you simply want something too much that God doesn't want for you. Your greatest love and treasure in this life should be God the Father Himself so regardless of what comes you should be thankful because He is a treasure that can't be taken.

Short Term Pain for Long Term Benefit

Additionally, remember, while the circumstances and situations of your life may not be playing out as you would have written them that doesn't mean that it isn't for your best. If my girls got to write the story of their life today they would have never received any shots from the doctor. In a sense their lives would have had less stress or hurt in them, that is until one of them gets polio, right? As their Father I know that this temporary pain of a shot is worth the long-term gain it will garner. God knows the same in our lives as our Heavenly Father.

Resting in God

So what does this all mean for us? It means that we should be able to rest in God, knowing He is going to provide for us from a heart that wants the best for us. Just as my kids are sheltered from the stresses of life because they simply trust for me to provide for them, we can rest easy in life knowing that God will care for us as well. We all have needs, we all have trying situations, we all have fears, we all face the stress of various demands on our lives and this reality ought to cause us to run to God asking Him to provide just as a child runs to his Dad when he is hungry or needs help tying his shoes. This is what it means to cast your cares upon the Lord. We take our concerns and lay them at the feet of God and we leave them there as we trust God to provide.

What a joy to have a Heavenly Father who cares for us like this, that provides for us in generous and loving ways. How wonderful is to be a child of God?

Let's continue on in our study. The next aspect of God's Fatherhood we are going to look at how God lovingly pursues His own.

LOVINGLY PURSUES (Matthew 18:12-14)

Listen to how Jesus describes the Father...

Matthew 18:12-14

[12] What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? [13] And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. [14] So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

We are Wanderers

Jesus speaks to the relationship that God the Father has with His children through a shepherding analogy. This analogy starts with a sheep that wanders away from the flock and the leadership of the shepherd. **That is us, right? We are wanderers. We leave that which is good for temporary pleasures and short-lived highs. We leave the safety of God's path for paths of destruction disguised as adventures.**

God Owes Us Nothing

When we do this, what does God owe us? Nothing. God doesn't owe us anything. God has graciously brought us into His fold, into His family as sons and daughters, and if we choose to rebel and run and leave His wise leadership to pursue sinful desires that is on us. We are responsible for the harm and the destruction that we are bringing upon ourselves with our sinful pursuits.

Chasing After the Beloved Sheep

While this is true, God is not content to simply leave us wandering into the darkness and danger of sin. He pursues us. He pursues us as a shepherd who lost one of his sheep. Now, I would venture to guess that no one here tonight is a shepherd, but something you need to know about shepherds back in this day and time is that they in large part spent most of their days with no one but their sheep. So those sheep were not just random animals, they were pets, they were dearly loved. Jesus communicates this with the response of the shepherd in these verses when he finds the sheep. He rejoices over the rescued sheep.

Lesser to the Greater

Again, the argument from the lesser to the greater needs to be applied here. If a shepherd would abandon his flock to pursue and rescue one of his lost sheep, **how much more so would God for His children? We are the people that God the Son laid down His life for. We are sons and daughters of God the Father. By His grace, and His grace alone, we are valuable in the sight of God**, so God is not content for us to walk into destruction. He pursues us.

Powerful Image

What an incredible image of God the Father's love for His children. He doesn't owe us anything. He would absolutely be within His rights to say, "Fine, if they think they know better and can find better let them, they will see they were wrong." Rather than taking this cavalier attitude towards His wayward children He comes after us!

More Concerned About Our Restoration Than Us

John MacArthur says this about God's loving pursuit of His children...

"The Savior is infinitely more anxious and determined for restoration than is even the most repentant believer."

-John MacArthur

God the Father is more passionate and determined to see us restored than even we are when we are at our most broken-hearted and repentant. What an incredible realization. God lovingly pursues us when we wander, when we abandon following Him to chase idols and sin.

Application – Finding Identity in God the Father

How does all of this make you feel? I think this is incredible. **I love the fact that even when I screw up, even when I rebel, even when I turn my back on God that He has not turned His back on me, in fact He is coming after me,** He is pursuing me, He is going to send help to draw me back to Himself from the sin I have entangled myself in.

Expect for God to Pursue You

So what does this mean for you child of God? It means that when you wander from God you should expect to see God's hand guiding you back to Himself. This can come in almost limitless forms.

- **It may be a brother or sister** in Christ pursuing you and calling you back from your sin.
- **It may be God reminding you in some way of the sweetness of His fellowship.**
- **It could even be God allowing the consequences of your sin to fall full force on you** so you can see the danger of where you are headed.

Regardless of what form it takes, it is all done in love so that you will not find yourself in greater danger and experiencing greater destruction.

Return to God

When God is calling us back to Himself we need to run, not walk. Just as a sheep removed from the fold on his own, we are easy targets. We may not see ourselves in this light in the moment, which is why it is so important to study and know God's Word so that we can interpret life not through the lens of our own experiences or limited knowledge, but by the limitless knowledge of God that bathed in love for His children.

Amazing Love, Incredible Joy

And this passage certainly communicates the love of our Heavenly Father. **He chases after us, even when we are running from Him.** He desires to restore us more than we even desire restoration when we are at our most broken and in need. What a joy to have a Father who lovingly pursues us!

Transition

The next attribute of God's Fatherhood I want us to consider is how He Tenderly Loves His Children...

TENDERLY LOVES (Luke 11:-24)

This next attribute of God's Fatherhood is closely tied to what we just learned about God's loving pursuit. Listen to the words of Jesus from Luke 15...

Luke 15:11-24

[11] And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. [12] And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. [13] Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. [14] And when he had

spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. [15] So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. [16] And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. [17] “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! [18] I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. [19] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ [20] And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. [21] And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ [22] But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. [23] And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. [24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

I Wish You Were Dead

This parable of Jesus almost tells the same story of the lost sheep analogy He gave us from Matthew 18. In the story of the Prodigal Son we see a wandering and wayward son, who selfishly and hatefully, asked for his share of his father's inheritance before his father had even died. This was a great show of disrespect. It was the equivalent of saying, “I don't really care about you Dad, but I do care about your money and I am not patient enough to wait around for you to do so can you just give it to me now.” It is almost like saying, “I wish you were dead.”

Hitting Rock Bottom

The Father, being incredibly gracious, gives his son his share of the inheritance. His son leaves and moves to the big city where he chooses to live a life of wickedness. He abandons all of the morals that his father had taught him growing up. This son lived as a fool and it quickly caught up with him as he ran out of money and all of his “friends” left him as the money dried up. The son has now hit rock bottom. He doesn't have a place to live, he doesn't have any food to eat, he is penniless without any prospects.

Feeding the Pigs

So he finds whatever job he can and the best he can do is a job that has him feeding pigs. This was a particularly disgusting job, firstly because pigs are disgusting animals, secondly, because pigs eat nasty slop that is the left overs or remains of what no one else will eat, and thirdly and most significantly, pigs were unclean animals back in this day and time so for this wayward son to be working with pigs meant he had totally bottomed out in life. We read that the son wished he could eat the pods the pigs were eating, but alas he had been given nothing. He wasn't even eating as good as the filthy pigs.

A Long Shot

As the wayward son longingly stares at the pig's slop he stopped and thought about how his father's servants lived so much better than he had been living. Maybe, just maybe, if he returned home his father would allow him to come and work as a servant. I mean, this was a long shot perhaps. The son had shown incredible disrespect to his father and squandered the families' money on debauchery. He had brought great shame to the family name and caused great hurt to the family. Would father even consider taking him back as a servant? That is the question that we are left asking.

Looking for the Son

In verse 17 we see the son walking the road home. As the son begins to get close to home the father spots him in the distance. **It was almost as if the father was looking for the son.** Each and every day he was outside working he longed to see his son walk that road home to him. He wasn't looking for his son to come walking down that road so he could give him a big “I told you so, you loser” that he had been rehearsing for months. The father is not holding grudges over past sins.

Running to the Son

Rather **the father's heart is full of compassion, so much so that when he sees it is his son he runs.** This is a stunning picture. Remember, the father was the one the son sinned against. He didn't need to seek out the son, right? **Most would expect the father to sit and wait for a full apology to come before he revealed his great love so he would not seem weak.** Despite all of this the father runs to the son.

Undignified

Additionally, the father was the head of the household and older men were to live in a dignified way. Culturally speaking running was not dignified. Running was something kids did, not full grown men. It was also not dignified b/c men who were established like this father wore robes so to run meant he would have to hike it up like a skirt. As a man, it is hard to hike up something like a skirt, run, and feel manly about it. But this father did not care. He hiked up his robe and ran as fast as he could.

The father did not care about any of this. He was not concerned about how others viewed him. He was concerned with his son who lost and is now found. This father's love far outweighed any pride he had about how others might view him. So he ran to his son.

Bringing Him Back Into the Family

As soon as he meets his son he grabs him in an embrace that communicated just how much he had missed the son and still loves him. Before the son is even able to get out the full apology and request that he undoubtedly had been rehearsing the whole walk home, the father jumps in with instructions to the servants to bring out the best robe they had as his sons clothes were filthy and ragged. He tells them to bring a ring for the son. This ring likely had the family signet on it, communicating that this man was part of the family. He also asks for shoes to be brought out, a luxury most servants didn't enjoy. On top of all of this the best calf was to be prepared for a great feast as today was a day of celebration.

Showing Us the Father's Love

The father's response here is astounding. It is so much more than the son deserved. It isn't what we expected as the love and compassion for the wayward and sinful son seem to gush forth from the father.

In telling this story Jesus is intending to help us know our Heavenly Father better. Back in Matthew we already saw how the Father lovingly pursues those who wander from Him, **now we get more detail into how God receives those whom He pursues. There is great tenderness. There is incredible love.**

A Love Hard to Accept

The love that God has for His children so surpasses anything that we would ever dream up that it is hard to accept. When we stumble, when we fall, when we give into sin and realize the folly of our ways it is hard to imagine why God would be interested in taking us back. Why would God want anything to do with someone like me who can't seem to shake certain sins, who blew it grand ways, who has shown himself to be so selfish? **These are all fair thoughts as we examine ourselves before God and His holiness, however these thoughts don't take into consideration God's immense, abundant, abounding love that runs to us,** that calls for the finest robe to be wrapped around his prodigal children, and for the family signet ring to be put on their finger, and sandals to be put on their feet. This immense love of God goes beyond explanation or understanding, but this is exactly the kind of love that God has for His children.

Application – Finding Identity in God the Father

What does this truth about God the Father mean for us as God's children? It means that we are abundantly loved by our Heavenly Father. **It means that we are never truly alone in this life because the kind of love that has been described of God the Father is a never-giving up, always, and forever kind of love.** This is the love that Paul wrote of in Romans 8...

Romans 8:37-39

[37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God. In your moments when you are feeling alone, remember you are never alone. You have a Heavenly Father whose love for you plumbs depths you can't even imagine.

Never Too Far Gone

Living in light of this love also means that we are never too far gone from God. **Our sin will never take us beyond where God's love reaches.** It is good to be broken over our sin. Sin is ugly. Sin is directed first and foremost towards the One who loves us most, God. **We should be broken over our sin, yet at the same time we need to remember that through the work of Christ, God's love surpasses our sin and overcomes it.** God longs to see you restored, which means we don't have to live defeated lives, we are more than conquerors through Christ!

What a joy it is to have a Heavenly Father who loves us perfectly and whose love reaches further and higher than we will ever know.

Transition

Let's look at one final attribute of God's Fatherhood tonight, let's look at how He Powerfully Protects...

POWERFULLY PROTECTS (John 10:22-30)

Listen to how Jesus describes God's protection towards His children...

John 10:22-30

[22] At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, [23] and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. [24] So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." [25] Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, [26] but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. [27] My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. [28] I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. [29] My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. [30] I and the Father are one."

There is a lot in this passage that we are going to skip over to focus on the Fatherhood of God, but what we see is Jesus talking to a group who knew there was something clearly different about Him. So they asked Him, Are you the Christ? Are you the Messiah? Jesus responded by saying, "I've been telling you this the whole time, yet you have not really believed and the reason you haven't believed is because you are not one of my sheep. I would love to unpack the doctrine of election and what this all means, but we will

have to come back to this when we walk through the book of John, which we will be starting in the next few weeks.

Jesus goes on to say that His sheep hear His voice and they follow, they believe. He then explains that His sheep are His sheep because God the Father has given them to Him (cf. John 6) and He has given them eternal life. **This eternal life that he has bestowed upon His flock can't be stolen or taken because God the Father is guarding it. God the Father protects His children.**

My Fear of Home Depot

Growing up from time to time my Dad would go to Home Depot to pick up something that he needed for a home project. Whenever he went he would make me come along with him. I am sure he saw it as man bonding time as we stood around lumber and tools. Maybe he hoped some of it would rub off on me. Sorry Dad. In any event, as a little kid I hated home depot because they had these really loud fork lifts that made this loud rumbling sound and had this screeching beep when they backed up. They were also huge and with all the noise I was pretty sure one was going to straight run over me and no one would hear my screams. I was scared. Any guesses as to what I did as a little kid? I clung to my Dad. I never walked so close to my Dad as in those moments. Why? **Well, my Dad was the strongest guy I knew and not only that I knew he would protect me from anything. I found so much rest and comfort in this. I could have never braved the scary terrain of Home Depot apart from the security I found in my Dad.**

None Stronger

Our Heavenly Father is our protection and Jesus says that **there is none greater than God, none stronger, none mightier, none wiser or smarter, none more powerful. God is the greatest force in all existence and He has purposed that His children will have eternal life, thus no one can change this.** No one can take God's children from His hand. The hand represents power. So long as we are under God's power, His guard, our eternities are secure. Listen to now King Nebuchadnezzar spoke of God's power...

Daniel 4:34-35

[34] At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever,
for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
[35] all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand
or say to him, "What have you done?"

Our eternal destinies lie in the hands of this God, our Father, Dad.

- Who can snatch us out of His hand?
- Who can remove us from His family?
- Who can take from us what He has given us?

No one. **The collective power of the entire universe is as nothing before God.**

Application – Finding Our Identity in God the Father

So what does this mean for us? It means that our eternities are secure. Nothing can threaten what God has promised to His children, right? This is a hope that we desperately need.

- We need to know that in the end everything is going to work out gloriously.
- We need to know that the promises of eternal reward will be paid out to make it all worthwhile.
- We need to know that we are not walking this life alone, but reside in the hand of God.

We are secure.

Finding Comfort and Security in the Father

Just as I found comfort and security at my father's side with the loud, threatening fork-lifts in Home Depot, we as God's children should find comfort and security in our Heavenly Father. **The one thing that is inescapable in this life is death. It terrifies most,** so we choose not to think of it, we distract ourselves from it so as to not have to deal with it or its inevitability. But knowing that Jesus has given eternal life to those who have believed in Him and God the Father is personally protecting that promise, that gift, death has lost its sting, as Paul writes.

Free to Live!

Without the fear of death hanging over us we are free to really live life for the glory God. We can invest our lives in the purposes that God has set forth for us because we know that **we are not missing out on anything. Rather we are investing into a greater, more joyous existence** in the life that is to come. **We are even free to take risks for the glory of God because we don't walk the tightrope of life without a safety net.** Should we ever fall our safety net is eternal life, or as the Psalmist writes, the fullness of joy and everlasting pleasure.

What a joy it is to have a Heavenly Father that is protecting our eternities, our souls! God is good and those who have put their faith in Jesus are blessed to call Him Father.

CONCLUSION

I want to close out tonight with a word of thanksgiving. God is our Father. This is special. This is unbelievable. **We are His children. This shouldn't be, but it is. Only by grace, incredible grace that stretches further than we can imagine.** And knowing who God is as our Father should change who we are, it should define who we are. As we find our identity in God the Father we should be filled with joy, immersed in comfort, and totally secure in our futures.

As we celebrate Father's Day may we also celebrate our Heavenly Father who has changed our lives and eternities by adopting us into His family and making us His sons and daughters. What love?!? I'll close with these words from John...

1 John 3:1a

[1] See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

LET'S PRAY

Visual Theology

The Fatherhood of God Applied

