

The Fatherhood of God

Charles Leiter | *illbehonest.com*

Well, let's pray before we look into the Word. Our Father, we ask You for Your Holy Spirit this evening - the Spirit of faith and power and love and of a sound mind. We ask You that You would glorify Yourself that we'd come away with a little glimpse of who You are. Help us, Lord. We're not able to do that, but we pray that You would do it; that You'd take control. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Well, our text this evening is found in Matthew 6:9. Matthew 6:9, and actually just the first part of the verse. "Pray then in this way, 'Our Father, who is in Heaven...'" "Pray then in this way, 'Our Father, who is in Heaven...'" As you know, these are the first words of what's called "the Lord's Prayer." Maybe a better name would be the "model prayer" or the "pattern prayer" because the Lord is giving us this prayer as a pattern for our own praying. And as for the larger context, this prayer comes about in the middle of what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, and this glorious passage of Scripture that begins at the beginning of Matthew 5 and goes all the way to the end of Matthew 7. And at the end of this sermon, Matthew makes this comment. He says, "the result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching." They were amazed at His teaching.

A couple of years ago there in Kirksville, we spent some time considering the amazing teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ; the radical teachings of Jesus. And by the time we finished the series, I basically had come to the conclusion that everything the Lord Jesus taught was radical. It's amazing. I mean, think of it. "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." What a shocking word that was in that setting! "Every idle word that a man shall speak, he shall give account for it in the day of judgment." You know that has to be true. God's not going to let some things slip by, but just think about that. "That which is highly esteemed among men..." Think of that. "...Highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God." "Unless a man is born again, he can't see the Kingdom of Heaven." You've got to be born two times. Think of these things! Just one after another! "Don't think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." "Strive to enter at the narrow gate; for many will seek and will not be able." "Before Abraham was born, I am." "No one knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Think of this. Jesus said nobody in the whole world knows the Father except for Me, and anybody that I choose to reveal Him to. Well, we could go on and on, couldn't we? The wonderful, radical, world-changing teachings of Jesus.

But tonight then, I'd like for us to focus on one thing; one of those teachings, and that is the teaching of the Lord Jesus concerning the fatherhood of God. "Pray then in this way, 'Our Father, who is in Heaven...'" We can't imagine how radical and earth-shaking these words were in the day in which they were spoken. The Jews had heard many times of the fatherhood of God in relation to the corporate nation of Israel. Just one example: Hosea 11:1, "When Israel was a youth, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son." So there's the Father - the Father of Israel His son in a corporate sense. And even on the individual level, there were some passages, like Isaiah 43:6, He says, "Bring My sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth."

So there were some things like that, but when it came to the matter of private prayer, the Jews never addressed God as "our Father." In fact, those who have done a thorough study of the rabbinic writings just in recent years, say that no Jew ever used the term "father" as a direct address to God until the 10th century A.D. In other words, Christians had been saying "our Father" for 1,000 years before any Jew began to do that as far as any records that we have. They spoke of "the Father," but they never used the term "Father" to address God in prayer. Yet, Jesus did it repeatedly, and He taught us to do it. He said, "When you pray, pray like this, 'Our Father in Heaven.'"

Beloved, if you are Christian, God is your Father in a way that far exceeds any fatherly relationship that He had with the corporate nation of Israel. In fact, God is your Father in the most intimate, personal way imaginable. You have been born of God. John says born, "not of the will of the flesh or the will of man, but born of God." And he goes so far in 1 John, he says, "God's seed remains in you." We would have never said something like that, but he says that. "God's seed remains in you." You've been born of God. This fatherly relationship with God. In another place, he says we've become - Peter says, we've become "partakers of the divine nature." You're a child of God, both by legal adoption and by spiritual birth. And from deep within you comes welling up this elemental cry, "Abba, Father." Abba, Father. An intimate, love relationship with the God of the universe.

Beloved, this is a fatherhood that's far deeper than any human fatherhood. It's the reality of which the best earthly father is only a shadow. In fact, God created earthly fathers so we'd have some idea of what He's talking about when He says He's our Father. Sadly, many of you may have had fathers that you have to try to forget about in order to get a right concept of God. But to the degree that there's common grace - I know myself and my home, my father did not truly know the Lord, but we went to church, and he, in many ways, gave me a glimpse of what it is to be a father. But all of those things are shadows. God created earthly fatherhood as the type of which He is the anti-type or the true Father. He is the only real Father that any of us will ever have. He's what fathers are supposed to be. And the Lord Jesus says this in Matthew 23:9, "Do not call anyone on earth your father. For one is your Father - He who is in Heaven." He's the real deal. Those other fathers are shadows. Hebrews 12:9, "We had fathers of our flesh to discipline us, and we respected them. Shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live?" So the best earthly fathers try to be on a human level what really only God can be to us.

But Jesus not only taught us to say, "Father," to God, He taught us to say, "Our Father." And this means, first of all, He's my father on an individual, personal level. And we've said that. But think of this, in teaching this, He's teaching us that we're part of a family; that we've got brothers and sisters. So there's true fatherhood - the only real fatherhood that ever was. And the real family - true brothers and sisters on a level that's never been in an earthly family. Think of that. And so we gather together as a family. And we lift our voices and say, "Our Father." Our Father. I mean, when we come to the place, when all these little things that our brother talked about this morning that we separate over this and that, when we come to the place where all that falls away and we stand in the presence of our Father, we will feel a love for each other that is unimaginable. Brothers and sisters of the true Father. Men from every tribe and tongue and nation. Think of that. Wasn't that glorious to see all those different languages? And there's so

many more - there's thousands more. All one in Christ. All part of the same family. All from the same Father. All born from the same Father. Indwelt by the same Spirit.

Well, God is our Father. What else does Jesus say? Not only our Father, but He's our Father in Heaven. In Heaven. In other words, He's in a different realm than we are. He's the Creator. We're the creature. He's infinite. We're finite. You know, we use this word "infinite" - we don't really have any idea what that words means.

When I used to study math in college, we would talk about a particular function at a certain point - it goes to infinity we'd say. It goes to infinity. And in your mind, you picture this really, really, really large number that looks like this... it goes to infinity. But you see, once you get to that number, you're not any closer whatsoever to getting to infinity because there isn't any end to it. And so you travel a million, million, million miles and you haven't gotten any closer whatsoever because there isn't any place - you're never going to get there. You don't get any closer. Those are when you think in terms of space or in terms of numbers, but when we think in terms of God, infinite - we don't even know what that means. But He's infinite.

So, how far have we come already? Well, Jesus said pray like this: "Our Father in Heaven." What's it mean? It means that we are in a love relationship, an intimate family relationship with God, and the God that we're in this relationship with is both personal and infinite. He's our Father in Heaven. Both personal and infinite. And that's the foundation and governing reality of the Lord's prayer that follows after, and all prayers, and the whole Christian life; that our Father is both infinite and personal.

Charles Hodge pointed out many years ago that the human mind left to itself cannot come up with that. When men start thinking about God, and they start moving in the direction of an infinite God, they lose His personality. And you see that in Eastern religion. They talk about a god as a little-g god that is another name for everything. But the God of Hinduism for example is not a personal God. It's just another word. It's an "it." A word for everything. And some of you know about reincarnation. You know that you're reborn, you're reborn, you're on this wheel. The idea is to get off of the wheel of rebirth and to blend back into the nothingness of the impersonal. Hindus don't want to be reborn; they want to get off of that and blend back into nothingness. Why am I saying that? Well, because there's no place for a person or for personality in Hinduism because the god of Hinduism is impersonal. In other words, it can't hear; it can't speak. It's less than we are. And the Hindu idea of nirvana is not at all like a Christian idea of heaven. It's a negation of personality; not an affirmation of who you are.

And so, you know in Buddhism, you have this saying, "man enters the water and leaves no ripple." In Christianity, you have: man enters the water and leaves ripples that go on forever. Because God is personal as well as infinite.

But anyway, you go in that direction - the mind of man has the infinite. You go in the other direction, you have the personal gods, but they're not infinite. Greek gods are like that. This is popular in our day - all these various "gods." And they're a bunch of big men and women fighting each other. And they're nothing. You see, you have personality, but unless God is infinite, He's just a big man who can't help you. He's in the same predicament you're in. But if you've got a God who exists - I mean, we can imagine a fire that burns; you keep putting logs on it. We can't imagine a fire that burns on its own forever. These are some of the things that we're talking about when we talk about a self-existent, infinite, personal God.

So, our God is both infinite and personal, and with Him we have answers to everything. But, oh, what a hard time we have holding on to both realities. The mind of man wants to go one way or the other constantly. If we start seeing how great God is, immediately we start thinking what could He care about my little problems. And He gets more and more removed from really entering in to our feelings and our trials. You start going the other way and you really begin to realize how much God cares, and you start thinking of Him as little. You know, He's torn with the same problems you are, and He can't figure out what to do, and He's struggling with things. You see this in false theology. You see both directions all the time. But God is both infinite and personal.

So, first of all, He's infinite. He's in Heaven. And that's absolutely foundational to the whole Christian life, and to every prayer that the Christian prays. "Thy kingdom come." Well, God's infinite. He's able to make His kingdom come. John the Baptist said God is able from these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. So, we got out and look at things and say it's impossible - what's God going to do? Look at Islam. I've read accounts in the last year or so of people in Mecca having dreams that led them to read the New Testament and get converted. I mean, God's able to do anything. He's able to save, no matter how obstinate and impossible the sinner is. God says to Ezekiel, "Son of man," you know, he went out and looked at that valley of dry bones; there were very many and they were very dry. And God says, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I remember, years ago, I used to live in Lawrence, Kansas. One time, I went to the natural history museum there. It was late in the day and I think I was about the only person in there. I probably was the only person in there. And I walked around in those hallways with my footsteps echoing, looking at those bones. "Son of man, can these bones live?" And you look at the bones of those tar pits and those saber-tooth tigers and all that, and you look at them - they're very dry after thousands of years. But God speaks and they begin to come together. You see, this is the foundation. God's infinite power is the foundation of our praying for the kingdom to come. Nothing can stop Him from bringing in His kingdom! He's infinite in power! He can do anything! He can keep kings from sleeping at night so they happen to pick up a book and read it, and that type of thing, you know? He can save your child. He can save the most impossible cases. The devil will tell you, "look, God's a God of the mountains, but not the valleys." "He can save so-and-so, but this problem's different." "You never hear about anybody getting saved with that kind of problem." God hears that and He says, "We'll see about that."

Daily bread? Just think about these requests in the Lord's prayer. Daily bread? You need daily bread? He's infinite in power. He's able to bend heaven and earth to get daily bread to you. He's able to do far above all we can ask or think. He's able to make all grace abound to you that always having all sufficiency in everything you may have an abundance for every good work.

I remember Bob Jennings told me, and Terri may have to correct me on some of the details, but one time, when they didn't have any money, and they're praying and need daily bread, and as I recall, it was in the parking lot of the grocery store. They got out and he said the wind was blowing and it blew a dollar bill up to his feet. Well, you can't buy much food with a dollar bill, but it's God saying, "look, I can give you a windfall. I can do anything. I just want to remind you, I'm in charge of this." If we put together the testimonies in this room tonight of all the miraculous provisions, I mean, it would be astounding. I used to keep a book of that until the

book got full. One thing after another where God faithfully provides in ways that we can't imagine.

Knowledge. Francis Schaeffer used to say, "There's no black hole back of God." There's no hidden things that He doesn't know. He knows everything. He's infinite. Because He knows everything, nothing's going to come out of the darkness and surprise Him and overthrow His plans. Providence. We talked about that last year. He's able to control every insect, every snowflake, everything, every aspect because He's infinite! Deliverance from sin? God's infinite. He's able. Beloved, do you believe this? He's able to take the most helpless, hopeless drunk or drug addict and make them stand. And Paul says stand he will, for God is able to make him stand. We used to sing that song, "It's the grandest theme in the earth or main, our God is able to deliver thee." Praying for some weak and struggling brother? God's infinite. He's able to keep Him from falling and present him faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Praying in relation to the powers of darkness pressing around? Brother Dan told me that over there where they're laboring, you feel it, you feel it, he's laboring under it all the time. I didn't feel it because he's bearing it. God's infinite. Principalities and powers are nothing to Him. Greater is He who is in you - how much greater? Infinitely greater! He's not just a little bit greater; He's infinitely greater. Jesus is dealing with a legion of demons. He just says, "Go." God is infinite. We come to Him with reverence and awe as the one who is infinitely exalted. You know, even the Lord Jesus Himself in John 17, He says, "O Righteous Father." "Holy Father." We're not talking about a flippant attitude in this fatherhood. He's the infinitely exalted One. But at the same time, God is personal. He's our Father. The God who spoke the universe into existence is our Father.

At the present estimate, how many stars do you think there are? Ten thousand? Well, I think all the grade school kids here know better than that. How about ten thousand billion? That's a lot. How about ten thousand billion trillion? That's how many at the present estimate. It's probably more than that now. It's been a couple years since I read that. So what's a trillion? When you take a million of something, and you take a million of those millions, we can't even imagine that. You've got a million; and you've got a million of those millions. Now take a billion of them. A billion of them. And take ten thousand of that billion trillion, and the Bible says, He calls them all by name. Because of the greatness of His power, not one of them's missing. He calls them out Now, think of this. He's not calling them "one-billion-one," "one-billion-two," "one-billion-three." You know what names are in the Bible? They talk about some characteristic of something. He's got a unique name for every one of those ten thousand billion trillion stars! And each name - mysterious names - and names that go into what the character of that star is. And He's your Father. What right do we have to be so unbelieving? It's pitiful, isn't it? We can't lay hold of it. We've got to ask our Father, "Help. Help me. Help me to see." "Help me to believe a little bit of what You're able to do!" Our God is a personal God. Now, you theologians, don't let philosophy rob you of this reality. Some of the things I've read about God's supposed impassibility - that is, His inability to experience pain or emotion - they're sheer philosophy, and they fly in the face of a thousand Bible verses. It's from theologians thinking too long about God's infinity. If you do that, you can't hang on to His personality. But they say, look, God's impassible. He can't be touched with emotion. Well, let me read a little bit to you.

"Grieve not the Spirit of God." Don't make Him sad. That's what the word grieve means. You can look it up and look at all the other verses. "As a bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you." How many of you have ever been to a wedding? You think there's any emotion there? You look at the groom and the bride comes through - we don't believe this! The infinite God - He says, "I'll rejoice over you like a groom rejoices over the bride." Isn't it amazing? "He will exult over you with joy. He will be quiet in His love. He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy." That sounds like some emotion to me. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son." He delivered Him up. And we can't comprehend this, but we know this, it cost God greatly to crush His Son. That's a revelation. God revealed that to us. Think of Abraham and that offering up of Isaac. He says, "take now your son, your only son, whom you love." What's He saying to us? He's getting across that what Abraham felt, there's something, somehow connection with Him sacrificing His Son. Beloved, God is not some philosophical "X," He's our Father. "'Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate,' saith the Lord, 'and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you.'" I'll welcome you. "'And I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,' saith the Lord Almighty." You see it? Your Father in Heaven. He's almighty, and here He says, "You'll be My sons and daughters." He treats the ladies - "You're My daughters." And to the men, He says, "You're My sons." Think of that. Isn't that special? This God that we're talking about.

Implications of the Fatherhood of God

Well, what are some of the implications of the fact that God is our Father in Heaven? I've got nine of these. And most of them come from the Gospels. Some come from other places where they're a little clearer. But some of the implications - and this will be the rest of the message.

God is a Father

The first implication - I believe the most profound implication - and I hope that I'll be able somewhat to get it across. What's it mean that God is my Father? It means that I have a lap to climb into. I have Someone - you have Someone to hold you. You have a Father. You have a home. You belong. Think of the terrible state of those who have no heavenly Father. You're flying in a plane at night over some unknown city, looking down in the darkness on thousands and thousands of little specks of light, and every one of them is a house. Unknown names. In those little specks of light are people. Unknown people. Thousands of them. Tens of thousands of them. Millions of them. And then you realize, you're one of those little, unknown... I'm talking about a person without God. The feeling that you have. Pascal said it like this, "When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after..." He's talking about our smallness in relation to time. "...When I consider the small space which I fill, or even can see engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I know nothing and which know nothing of me. I'm terrified. And I wonder that I'm here rather than there." Have you ever thought about it? "I'm here rather than there, for there's no reason why here rather than there, or now rather than then." He says I think about that - I'm terrified. You see, without God, man is an orphan in a vast, cold, very uncaring universe that doesn't even know he exists. And when you look out on those millions of stars in the darkness, if you have no heavenly Father, you are nothing. You are

a nothing. And there's a terrible sense of insignificance and aloneness. I'll quote Pascal again. He says, "The eternal silence of those infinite spaces alarms me." But when you realize that your Father made all those stars, it's different, isn't it. And, that He's both infinite and personal. And He really does love you. Everything changes. You belong. You're accepted. And at the very root of all reality, you have a home. You have a place to go.

I remember one time I was in a strange city, and I was already a Christian, but it came over me - this sense of aloneness and smallness. It's terrifying. And then it came into my heart, "I will receive you. I will be a Father to you." And as soon as you have that, the infinite God is my Father! And everything's going to be alright. He's with me. You have a place to go. You have a home. You have a lap. You've found the ground of your existence and it's not some cold, abstract principle; it's the lap of a loving heavenly Father. Surely the opposite of that is part of what hell is. You remember Jesus talks about outer darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth. You look inside, there's warmth, there's a family, there's a home, there's rejoicing, there's Abraham and Isaac and Jacob coming; people coming from the east and west and reclining. And you're outside. They're in there. They have a Father. And you're outside in the darkness. No family. No Father. Well, I think the most fundamental meaning of having God as our Father, and that is we've found our reason for living. We've found the meaning of existence.

God Cares for Us Personally

But the second thing, that God is my Father means that I never need to be afraid because God cares for me in a personal and intimate way. Matthew 10:29-30, "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet, not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father, but the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Jesus says, "Don't fear them that kill the body." The One who names every star has numbered the hairs on your head. He cares that much about you. And you know, it's not the idea just that God knows how many hairs are on your head, He knew how many hairs were on Hitler's head. That's not the point. But that He's that concerned about you. That concerned, that not one sparrow can fall to the ground. You say, how do I know I won't fall to the ground and get killed? You don't know, but you do know this, it's not going to happen without your Father being right there controlling the whole thing. The context of these verses in Matthew 10 is persecution, but it applies to every area where we might be tempted to fear. God won't just let anything "happen" to us. He cares for me in a personal and intimate way. Not one of those little birds can fall to the ground apart from your Father.

God Provides for Us

But the third thing that the fatherhood of God means to me: the fact that God is my Father means He will provide for me. Now, we know these things. Matthew 6:26-33. "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feeds them." So there's the food thing. "Are you not worth much more than they?" He goes on, "Why are you anxious about clothing?" So now He's dealing with that. "Observe how the lilies of the field grow. They do not toil, nor do they spin, yet I say that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these, but if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do

so for you, O men of little faith? Do not be anxious then, saying, what shall we eat? Or, what shall we drink? Or with what shall we clothe ourselves? For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek, for your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things." So God is my Father. He'll feed me. He'll clothe me. He'll provide for me. What right do I have to be anxious? I'm not telling you anything you don't know, but beloved, how much have we entered into this? Can you imagine a life where you don't have any anxiety at all about any of that stuff because you know God is going to take care of it all? That He's infinite in power? That's what Jesus is talking about. He's talking about freedom from fear of somebody killing you. He's talking about freedom from fear of not having food or clothing or provision. Just to be totally free. Look, my Father owns everything. He spoke the universe into existence and all those stars. I don't have anything possible that could happen to me. A little bird can't fall to the ground. Think of this. The fact that God is my Father, it means that I don't have to use vain repetitions like the Gentiles do. He says your Father knows that you need those things before you ask.

We Can Trust God Implicitly

Number four: the fact that God is my Father means that I can trust Him implicitly. Now listen to this, "What man is there among you when his son shall ask him for a loaf will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil..." Now fathers - the best fathers - compared to the Heavenly Father are evil. They come so far short of what He is, but even we know how to give good gifts to our children. "How much more shall your Heavenly Father give what is good to those who ask Him?" Why would the Lord give this teaching? Well, because the devil is always telling us - you know the word "devil" (diabolos) means slanderer. And he's constantly slandering God to man, and he'll tell you that the kind of Father you have, that if you ask Him for an egg, He'll give you a scorpion. The devil tells you that. Constantly. He'll tell you God's a liar. "You shall not surely die." He tells you God's holding out on you. God knows that if you eat that, you'll have something good. He'll tell you that the good land that God is giving you devours its inhabitants. If you go in there, it will eat you up. All those slanders about the character of God. I've shared a lot more examples of this in talking about our adversary, the slanderer, but there's so many of them.

I was thinking before when I was preparing this, I was thinking of how many young people there are here. So you girls, you're praying, and you say, "Lord, I want You to choose a husband for me." Or you guys, you're praying, "Lord, I want to put it in Your hands. I want You to choose my wife." And the devil's right there saying, "Don't do that! God will give you the ugliest girl imaginable. Or, if you do that, you won't even get married at all. He won't even give you a wife. You've got to take this in your own hands." See, it all goes back to: do I have a Father? Do I have a loving Heavenly Father who can do anything? A.W. Tozer was telling his congregation one day about how he had put his little daughter into God's hands just for whatever God would have for her, and a woman came up after the sermon. She said, "Aren't you afraid to do that?" Think of what kind of God the devil tells us we have. You know, that he's an "evil" type God. I can trust Him implicitly. That's what Jesus is saying. He's saying you will never come as a child of your Heavenly Father and say, "Father, will You give me an egg?" and He says, "I will, son, now close your eyes and put out your hand," and He drops a scorpion into it. He'll never do that. He'll give good things to those who ask Him.

We Don't Have to Make an Outward Show of Goodness

Number five: the fact that God is my Father means that I never need to make an outward show of goodness. God is able to keep track of everything in secret and reward me in ways that no man ever could. Oh, that we could lay hold of this. "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them, otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in Heaven." And He goes through three things. "When you give alms, do not sound a trumpet." You want your alms to be in secret. Don't let your left hand know what your right hand's doing. "And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." When you pray, don't be like these hypocrites. They stand out in the open. They want to be seen by men. Go into your inner room, and shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. That's where God is. You say, God's so far away; I can't find God. Where is He? Well, He's in secret. "And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." And then He talks about fasting - not to put on a gloomy face to be seen fasting by men. "When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." Think of this: I don't have to put on a show to men. It doesn't matter what men think anyway. God knows. He sees everything in secret. Every bit of it He knows. And He said I'm not going to let you miss out. Just as I was preparing this, I'm thinking, Lord, over and over You're saying He will reward you; He will reward you. If you fast, if you pray, if you give in the presence of your Father, He'll reward you. We can be sure He will. He keeps perfect records. He sees everything in secret because He's infinite. And He will reward.

We Have a Perfect Example

Number six: the fact that God is my Father means that I have a perfect example to pattern my life after. I've got a Father worthy of emulating in every way. "You've heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say unto you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in Heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." I like that. It's like a little kid has an orange ball. God has His sun. "That's My sun." God causes His sun to shine. He causes His sun to shine on this earth. And He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. He says, "if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore, you are to be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect." We know how young sons want to imitate their fathers. Well, here's a Father worthy of imitation in every way. And the Lord Jesus looks at what's happening in the world around us. He says, look, your Father's being kind to these ungrateful and evil men. You imitate Him. "Love your enemies. 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 Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

God Disciplines Those He Loves

Number seven: (Is this good hermeneutics, Jesse, to have nine points?) The fact that God is my Father means that He loves me too much to leave me without discipline. Isn't that something? Hebrews 12, "You have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons. My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him. For those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful. Yet to those who have been trained by it afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." Proverbs 3:12, "For whom the Lord loves, He reprov's, even as a father the son in whom he delights." So, God loves me too much to leave me without discipline. That doesn't mean that every hard thing that happens to us is a punishment for sin. Sometimes a trainer will have a runner carry weights - something like that - he's not punishing him; he's disciplining him, preparing him; making him stronger. God does that too.

God's Attitude Towards Us is One of Kindness

Number eight: The fact that God is my Father means that His attitude toward me is one of kindness and compassion; not harshness and rejection. How many people are going around thinking that God is carrying this club waiting for them to slip up so that He can smash them? Jesus talks about this even in conversion. He says (Luke 15), "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him." He's telling us what God is like in His attitude toward us. Psalm 103:13-14, "Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him, for He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust." Think of what a wonderful thing that is! When I'm going through a trial, God knows our frame. He has compassion on us. He's mindful. My Father understands. He knows my frame. His attitude's one of compassion. He's so patient. He's so merciful. He's not a harsh taskmaster. Malachi 3:17, "'They shall be Mine,' says the Lord of Hosts, 'On the day when I make up My own possession, and I will have compassion on them as a man has compassion on his own son who serves him.'"

God Delights to Give Us an Inheritance

Last one. And I truly am sorry to have so many points. The fact that God is my Father means that He delights to give me an inheritance. You may feel ever so weak and afraid you may not even make it to heaven. Satan may tell you that God doesn't want you to make it to heaven. And that He's against you. That isn't true. Jesus said, "It's not the will of your Father who is in Heaven that one of these little ones..." He's talking about believers. "...That one of these little ones should perish." And none of them will. Not one. Right after Jesus tells us to seek first the kingdom, He immediately assures us, "Fear not, little flock, your Father has chosen gladly to give you the Kingdom." And according to the Lord Jesus, there's a day coming when the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Well, there's so much more that could be said. So much hinges on this love relationship between Father and son or Father and daughter. When our love for the Father is really strong

and clear, immediately we think about His name, wanting His name to be glorified. Immediately we think about wanting His kingdom to be advanced. You don't have to say, well, I've got to remember now to be concerned about the name of God. It just happens automatically when you're full of love for Him. And it happens automatically that when you pray for your daily bread, it's in connection with wanting His kingdom to come, not just selfish. And wanting to have victory over sin; wanting forgiveness for sin, and deliverance from sin is not so you'll feel better about yourself. But so that you can what? So that you can let your light so shine that men will see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven. Well, Jesus said when you pray, say, "Our Father in Heaven." May God help us to believe and lay hold of these things. Amen.