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The Fatherhood of God



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the concept of God as Father and its centrality in Jesus' teachings, emphasizing its therapeutic and instructive effect on our understanding of fatherhood. Gregg argues that the anti-father attitude prevalent in modern society can limit our ability to give God the reverence and honor He deserves, and that understanding God's fatherly nature can help fill the gaps caused by the inadequacy of earthly fathers. Through God's fatherhood, we can feel secure both physically and spiritually, and affliction and suffering become meaningful in shaping us for a greater purpose.

Transcript

Last time, last Sunday, I shared also from this pulpit, and the topic I felt to speak on at that time was the preeminence of God the Father. And so afterward, I had a number of suggestions about what I might do this week since it had already been arranged that I would speak two weeks in a row. And the suggestion that committed itself to me as I considered it was to go further on this subject matter of God being a father, of God being the Father.

Now, I'm not going to continue talking on the same vein as last week. I feel like I said all I needed to say or wanted to say on that matter of the preeminence of the Father, but I would like to talk about what it means to us to know that God is the Father, or even that He is a Father. Because as I said last time, the concept of God being the Father is a very familiar one to us, we who are Christians, we who live 2,000 years after this concept was introduced by Jesus Christ.

One might say that the idea of the fatherhood of God was introduced in the Old Testament. It was somewhat, usually in connection with the nation of Israel, and very often in terms of Israel being taken collectively as God's firstborn, as God's son, so that the Jew in the Old Testament did not necessarily think of God personally as his father or himself as God's son. In fact, the term sons of God in the Old Testament usually does not refer to humans at all.

But the idea that we who are believers are indeed sons and daughters of God, and that

we are to think of Him the way that sons and daughters think about a father, is that which really was introduced, at least as an emphasis, in the teachings of Jesus. I would be inclined to say it is the principal message of Jesus. I suppose if somebody would ask, or if I would ask a group of people, what would you say was the principal message of Jesus Christ? Some might say, well, the principal message was salvation, or the principal message was that we need to love one another, or some might say, well, the principal message was the kingdom of God.

All of these things are, of course, very, very predominant in the teaching of Jesus. But it is my opinion that there is none of them that is so predominant in his teaching as the concept of fatherhood of God. Last week, I gave a wrong statistic.

I said that Jesus referred to God as father 208 times. I recounted since then, and there are indeed that many references to father in his teaching, but some of them are about earthly fathers. I recalculated it was about 150 times that Jesus referred to God as the father, certainly more often than he referred to God by any other name or title, and far more frequently than the Old Testament ever used the term for God.

I mean, when I say far more, we're talking maybe 15 times in the Old Testament, and 150 in the teaching of Jesus alone. And so we can see that this idea that God is our father came with a new, a fresh emphasis in the teaching of Jesus, and the fact that it did needs to be pondered, because there must be a reason that Jesus wanted to introduce something about God that was not clear, not emphasized, maybe not even understood at all in the Old Testament, and that is that Jesus knew that we need to know God as a father. We need to know God because to know God is salvation, but we need in various ways to know God in all of his, all of the hats he wears, if I could dare use such a mundane expression concerning him.

I mean, when we consider the attributes of God, we might consider his kingly attributes, his husbandly attributes, because he is referred to as a husband to Israel. We might consider his shepherd-like attributes. There are many things that God is presented to us as in Scripture, and each of them calls to mind a certain set of attributes that reveal him in that role.

When we consider the fatherly attributes of God, it is particularly helpful to us in two ways. The concept, or grasping the concept, that God is a father, I believe, is intended to be both therapeutic, if I could use such a word. I usually avoid those kinds of words about spiritual things, don't I, Kurt? But I'm going to use the word nonetheless.

It can be therapeutic and it can be instructive. Now, let me tell you what I mean by both of those things. To say that grasping the concept of God being a father is therapeutic, I'm not really speaking psychologically, but I'm not, because I don't believe in psychology, but I'm not speaking about things that are entirely divorced from psychology either.

People like myself, who have an abhorrence of psychology, often may bend over backward too far to sound like I don't, you know, I don't want to be mixed in with that group who believe in psychology. The fact of the matter is, the problem with psychology is that it addresses the same issues that the Bible addresses and often gives different answers than the Bible gives to those questions. Insofar as psychology is considered to be a consideration of what makes people tick, it is a category that the Bible certainly addresses.

As I say, it doesn't give the same answers as psychology gives generally, but I think both the Bible and even secular psychology, and it's almost scary when those two things are found to agree on something, but I think they both would acknowledge that the presence of a father is a very formative and defining dynamic in a person's life, especially their upbringing, and that children who are raised without fathers present in the home or with fathers who are bad fathers, because they may be emotionally absent, or they may be physically absent, or they may be abusive, whatever, that people who do not have an adequate father growing up suffer somewhat in themselves, in the formation of their character and of their personhood. And the reason for that is that God never intended for children to grow up without fathers. Now, if we had another topic, I could talk about the importance of a child growing up with a mother as well.

But right now, I want to focus on the fact that a young person, not only a boy, but a girl too, a daughter, receives a great amount of their sense of who they are and what the world is about and how they are to relate to the world by the model and the instruction and the direction given by the presence of a father. And where that is absent, there is something of great importance missing. It's almost like if your life is a puzzle, and right in the middle, a very defining and important piece simply is missing.

A piece that maybe all the other pieces are connected to. And without that piece, you simply can't put it together. Now, I don't want to go where some people go with this, because some people say, well, if you were raised without an earthly father, then you simply are going to be emotionally crippled the rest of your life.

I don't believe that's true. David said in Psalm 27:10, when my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up. He did not indicate that he was doomed to be emotionally crippled.

But why? Because he had a surrogate. He had a father nonetheless. Though his earthly father might forsake him, though his earthly father might fail him, he was not left without a substitute, and a better substitute at that.

I mean, it says in Psalm 68, in verse 5, that God is a father to the fatherless. I don't know that I've ever, I don't know that any generation of church people has ever been so heavily shot through with people who, in some sense or another, have been fatherless as they are in this generation. And when I say in some sense fatherless, there are, of

course, more divorces in the past 30 years than at any other time in our country's history, at least.

And therefore, many, many children are raised without a father physically in the home. And where there are fathers, there are often fathers who didn't know how to be fathers, or didn't care to know how to be fathers, and who did a terribly inadequate job of fathering and parenting and training and bringing up their children. And that failure has created, in my opinion, a church even more desperately in need to know God as father.

Because, while it is so, that a person who lacks a good earthly father is not doomed to be emotionally crippled forever because God is there, if they don't know God as a father, the vacuum remains. That's why Jesus wants us to know that God is our father. That's one reason.

Now, the irony is that Jesus raised the concept of God as our father in a situation very different than our own. In an age where fathers were respectable, honored, looked up to, revered, and by bringing up the idea that God is your father, Jesus intended that people might be able to transfer from what they already knew and revered about their fathers, those concepts to God and recognize, oh God, he's a very, he's very winsome, he's very approachable, he's very caring, he's very protective, he's very, I can trust him, he'll provide for me. I mean, to know what your earthly father is, if your father is all those things, and be told, now listen, this God, it's almost like when Jesus came to the Jews, it was like Paul going to Athens, there's this unknown God out here I want to tell you about.

I mean, or as Jesus said to the Samaritans, you Samaritans worship, you know not what. Well, he could have said that to a certain degree about the Jews too, less so, but many of the Jews didn't know who this God was that they and their ancestors worshipped. And Jesus said, well here, here's how I want you to think about it.

You know what your father's like? God's a lot like that. Think of God like a father. Earthly fathers, they care for their children, even evil fathers won't give their child a stone when he asks for bread.

I dare say there are fathers today who would. But there weren't back then, at least no one had ever heard of one. And what was good and known to be good about fathers, Jesus intended to help us to see God in that light.

Now we live in a situation which is culturally and socially very different from his, where what we need is to understand what a father is supposed to be, an earthly father is supposed to be, and we can learn and be instructed by appeal to what the Bible tells us about God, the father. And so in addition to being therapeutic in the sense that it supplies a piece of our psyche that is damaged or missing, if we have been raised without adequate fathering, it's also instructive to us who are fathers, or who will be fathers, or maybe who may not be fathers and may never be fathers, but who will have

to know some fathers, maybe have to give some counsel to some fathers in your lifetime. Can't really think of anyone this wouldn't be helpful to, that we can say, okay, I don't really know what a father is supposed to be like, but I think they're supposed to be a lot like God, the father.

And I can look at God's fatherly attributes and say, regardless how poor a role model I may think I may have had, as for my earthly father, I have an excellent role model in God the father. Now, this is important because, you know, an awful lot is blamed these days on inadequate fathers, depending on what circles you're in, but it just seems to me like fathers not only have, you know, fallen down on the job a great deal, but they've taken a lot of heat, a lot of criticism, and a lot of blame for the way things have turned out, and frankly, a lot of that is deserved, but they should not take that kind of abuse from their children, I think. I believe that when the Scripture says, honor your father and your mother, that that suggests that if it is so, that your father dropped the ball, as it were, and let some things fall through the cracks that should not have been let go, and that you have lost something as a result, there still is a need for you to honor your earthly father.

And part of that is because God as a father deserves to be honored, and we are to learn how to honor our earthly fathers as a reflection of our honoring God the father, of which every earthly father is given as a model, a poor model maybe, but still it is the position of fatherhood that needs to be considered when we honor fathers and mothers. We know there's many people who have not had honorable fathers, but to honor your father would certainly mean at least that you don't blame him for all your struggles and your problems. You know, I have been appalled at times sitting among Christians where they sit and, I mean, just in conversation, they talk about all the failures their fathers and mothers have committed.

You know, I think of Noah, when he got drunk in his tent. Now, that was not very honorable. Getting drunk, I mean, he was more than a little drunk.

He was naked, he didn't know he was naked. He was passed out in his tent, naked and drunk. I can hardly imagine a more dishonorable condition for a father to be seen in by his children.

And one of his children came into the tent, saw him, and he went out and talked about it to his brothers. That son or that son's son got a curse on their generations for all time because of that treatment. What did he do? Well, I mean, people say, well, he may have done something more than is recorded.

Maybe he did, but we're not told. We're told that when Noah woke, he knew what his younger son had done to him. Well, all we're told that he had done was talked about it.

He did not cover his father's nakedness. He exposed it, as it were, in conversation to

others. And the other two brothers, when they heard about it, they took a cloak over their shoulders and walked backward into the tent where Noah was.

They did not look at him. They dropped the cloak over backwards to cover him up, and they left the tent because they did not wish to expose, but rather to cover their father's shamefulness. Now, many of us have had fathers.

I have not had a father who is shameful. My father was a good father. He had he had his defects, as all do.

But he was definitely the spiritual leader of the home. Humanly speaking, I'm a Christian today because of my earthly father. He made it.

My father has many things about him that I don't fully agree with and that I don't try to emulate. But I will have to say that my father is responsible for the fact that I know God, or at least I came to know God as early as I did because I came to know God as a very small child. And that was through largely the efforts of my father.

And I want to give my mother credit, too, only because she was very much supportive of my father. She was also a good Christian. But the evangelistic work and discipleship work in my early years was done by my father to me.

Anyway, I realize there are people who have fathers who of whom such commendable things cannot be said. And yet whatever uncommendable things can be said should not be said, at least not in the wrong company, not in the wrong setting. I do believe there are times when, you know, there may be an appropriateness to expose in a certain very private situation, something that your father did that that you know that you need to be prayed for about or something.

But the fact is, we have become much too easy about criticizing fathers. And this has caused the whole institution of fatherhood to come into disrepute. Everybody can find something to say about their father that their father did wrong.

And once they've said it, they can say, well, this has limited me or this has hindered me or this has tweaked my psyche in a certain way. And I'm you know, I'm very largely have the struggles I had because of what my father did. That may be very much true.

But it is not an honorable thing to your father to expose his nakedness in this way, I believe. And the reason is because we have to learn to honor God as a father. And once we have lost the ability to honor our earthly fathers, even if they're not perfect.

I mean, when Jesus said that a father doesn't give his son a stone, we ask for bread. He specifically says, even you earthly fathers being evil. I mean, he made reference to the fact that you earthly fathers, you are inadequate.

You're not perfect. You're not ideal fathers, but at least let me ask you this. Some of you have fathers that you probably have thought very few positive things about, but I wouldn't be surprised if you'd have to say, you know, every time I asked for bread, I had food.

Some of you would be able to say my father wasn't even there for that. But I'm saying that there are often things that that your father has done that are honorable. That's because of the spirit of our age and its anti-father attitude.

Your father perhaps has not been adequately appreciated. And that, I believe, is definitely a work of the devil in our society to cause us to not know how to honor fatherhood, because Jesus, when he came to present God to us as father, wanted us immediately to impute honor to him, such as one has toward a father. And if you don't have any honor toward a father earthly, then it seems very difficult, if not impossible, to impute that reverence and so forth that God wants.

Malachi chapter one, in verse six, God says, a son honors his father and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? If I'm a master, where's my reverence? It's Malachi 1.6. God says, listen, sons honor their earthly fathers. If you call me your father, and by the way, he's speaking in terms of collectively Israel viewed God as their father.

If I'm the father of this nation, why isn't this nation honoring me? Well, that's a good question. There wasn't a very good answer. But the fact is that God wants to be honored and deserves to be honored as a father.

And I'm sure the enemy wants very much to limit our ability to give God the reverence and honor that's due him by taking away from us the foundational understanding of honor toward fathers that was already present when Jesus began to talk about God is your father, God is your father. That honor should have immediately transferred. I believe that there is a scandalous lack of reverence for God in the modern church.

Not every congregation, but certainly in general. God is spoken of as if he's there simply to cater to what we want, to entertain us, to provide therapy for us or whatever. That God is there to meet my needs seems to be fashionable to talk about God in the most familiar terms.

And there's nothing wrong with being familiar with God. That's another reason Jesus wants us to know him as father, because he is one who wants to relate with us familiarly, but with that honor present, you know, a son can honor his father and revere his father and still be very familiar with him. And that is what I believe is expected of us when we consider God.

And that's what Jesus wanted us to know about God. But there's more. And I want to talk

about some of the attributes of God that pertain to his fatherhood as revealed usually by Jesus, sometimes in other parts of scripture.

And I want these to work two ways. One is if you have not had a father who has these attributes or who exhibited them very well. I want you to realize that these attributes exist in he who is the father of the fatherless.

And if you would, in some sense, count yourself to have been fatherless and feel that you have something missing inside because of that, and you may very well be correct. There are many people who could validly have this opinion of themselves that there's something missing in me because my father was not there. Well, I'd like to fill that gap with the truth about God, because once you know God is your father, then I believe that the vast majority of the damage done by the inadequacy of any earthly father can be basically eliminated.

I won't say all of it or I won't even say instantly, but I would say that the answer is to know God in that role. And as we talk about these fatherly attributes of God, I hope that you will get a vision of God. I can't give you that vision of God.

I'm not eloquent enough and eloquence alone couldn't do it anyway. It's a spiritual thing. I pray that the eyes of your understanding may be open, that you might receive the spirit of revelation and the knowledge of God so that God himself will reveal his fatherly nature to you, because we all desperately need that.

The other thing I want to be going through your mind as I consider these fatherly attributes of God is how these are instructive to me and you if you are a father or if you ever will be a father. What is a father? You know, I knew when I became a father 27 years ago that I knew nothing about the job. I was 20 years old.

I shouldn't say I knew nothing about the job because as I said, I had a good father, but he too was a product of his generation and he didn't, you know, already some of the problems in families that are manifesting now were present a generation ago and more. And so there were things about my father that I wasn't particularly wanting to duplicate. They're not things that I think are great errors he made necessarily, but they're just not, I felt there should be a way to improve upon this.

But I didn't have any role models better than my father except the father that Jesus revealed. And so in my fathering, I have generally sought to think, well, what would God, what does God do toward me when I when I deal with something in my children's lives? I think, well, OK, if if that was me and I was God, what does he do in situations like this? And so God has been my role model for fathering. I have not been a great protegee.

I have my own imperfections, and because of that, many of the attributes of God that I can, that I'm aware of and that I want to imitate, I don't imitate perfectly. And you won't

find me to be the model father. But what I'm trying to present to you is not me, the model father, but the actual model father, because you may, by the grace of God, emulate his example more perfectly than I did.

You see, Paul said in Ephesians five, one, be imitators of God as dear children. He specifically is referring to God, the father, obviously, when he says be imitators of God as dear children. He means the way little children who are beloved by their father imitate their father.

That's how you shall imitate God. And one of the ways in which sons imitate their fathers is when they grow up, they imitate their father's fathering. That's why it's so common for a boy who grows up in the home of someone who beats his wife.

Boy grows up, he beats his wife. Now, I'm not saying that the father who did it made him do it. That boy could have turned to God, could have changed role models and could have been a faithful Christian.

But because he didn't, he has this role model that he follows. And children naturally follow the role modeling of their father in fathering. And so we need to make sure we have a good role model.

If you don't have an earthly father who's a good role, let me put it this way. If you had a great earthly father who's a great role model, do what he did and realize that that's what God is like. And I hope that you can relate to God with as much honor and affection as you related to your earthly father.

If, on the other hand, you did not have such a father, you do now. And I'd like to introduce you to him, if I might. And there's certainly nothing original I have to say.

It was Jesus who introduced him to us. And I'd like to call to attention what it was that we had revealed to us in the New Testament about him. I have itemized in my notes, I think about six or so, fatherly attributes of God.

This is not a study of all the attributes of God, just the fatherly attributes of God. Other studies could cover other attributes of God as well. And these are the things that we find about God that are specifically related to his fatherhood and which specifically are things that we who are fathers must learn to do as well, as as much like him as possible.

Remember, Jesus said, as your father in heaven is perfect, so be perfect. Well, that's a high mark to strive for. But rather than just getting despondency, well, I can't be perfect and throwing that scripture out like file it away in the category.

Those are one of those scriptures I can't relate to or one of the hard things that Jesus get the message. He's saying the way your father is, be that way. Now, in Matthew five, it's as your father is perfect, be also perfect in the parallel.

And Luke, it's as your father is merciful, be merciful. But the point is, as your father is fill in the blank, so be fill in the blank with the same word. That's the point.

Now, here are some of the words. For fathers, God, the father and every good father is a visionary, that is, he has vision for his children. I believe when some of the greatest problems in our society exist because men have learned how to procreate, but have not learned how to father.

They have brought little people into the world for whom they had no vision. And it's it's evident. I mean, it's evident they had no vision for their children.

Many of them just walk away from them and leave them to fend for themselves. The ones who don't walk away often have very little time or attention to give to them. A father who just sits in front of the TV while his kids are growing up around him is not a man who has vision for his children, or at least if he does, it's inadequate.

Now, God, the father has vision for his children. He doesn't bring children into the world and then think, now, I wonder what I should do with these kids. He has a plan right from the beginning.

You come into existence not by accident, but because God already had a project. He already has a plan and a vision. And he brought you into this world and into his kingdom to be a part of that project and to grow up into the thing that he has in mind right from the beginning.

What is that thing? Well, it's expressed a variety of ways in Scripture. In Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 10, Hebrews 2.10, it says, it pleased God in bringing many sons to glory to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Notice, we often think of the part about making the captain of the salvation perfect through sufferings, and we need to think about that part, but there's another part.

It says, God in doing that did so because he intended to bring many sons. We could just say many children if we want a more inclusive term, but bringing many offspring, bringing many children to what? To glory. He has a glorious plan for you, and I don't believe that glory means heaven.

Now, maybe it does, but in the language of Paul more often, glory means the image of Christ. It doesn't mean he's just taking us to a home in glory land that outshines the sun way beyond the blue, but we are to be partakers in his glory. The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that should be revealed in us, Paul said.

He said, our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us an eternal and a weight of glory and exceeding an eternal weight of glory. The glory is something that's worked in us and for us and upon us so that we come into the state of glorification. And

what is that state of glorification? Well, God tells us in Romans chapter 8 and verse 29, for whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son.

That's the glory that he wanted to bring many sons into. God wants to bring many sons into glory. Well, what is this glory? Well, that he predestined that we should be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

See many sons, many brethren. God has a vision for a big family and his vision is that his children all come into the state of glory, which is described by Paul as being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. That's happening.

He's working on that. According to 2nd Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 18, that we all with open face beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord are changed from glory to glory into that same image that that is God's vision for you. If you're a father, you need to have vision for your children.

I sure did. Every child of mine that was born, I didn't just think, well, you know, something to feed here, you know, besides that was my wife's job for the first couple of years. But I mean, when I looked at my children, I thought, I wonder when he grows up, is he going to be the next Billy Graham? Is he going to be the next Elijah the prophet? Is he going to be the next apostle Paul? Is he going to be the next Hudson Taylor? Who knows? And when I look at my daughters, I think similar thoughts.

And there aren't as many, of course, female role models that come to my mind as there are in the Bible with so many males there. But what I really desire for my daughters is that they become godly mothers, Susannah Wesleys or whatever, you know, like Moses' mother. Moses' mother was the only spiritual formative influence in Moses' life when he was young.

And it worked. She was very potent. And I look at my children, I say, I don't want this just to be a person who grows up and they just go out and make money and they're just successful.

I mean, to me, my vision, I would have felt I was insulting my children. I thought, you know, my goal for you is that you could be president of the United States. Really? I'd rather have you rule the universe with Jesus Christ, frankly.

My goal for my children is that they will be holy and blameless before God and they will be His servants every day of their life and that they will come into glory and that they will be useful to God. I would consider my life wasted if I simply was, you know, became successful financially and I was of no use to God. And I'm frankly, whether right or wrong, I feel that way about my children, too.

And when my children are born, I'm already thinking, how can how can these children be made useful to God? How can these children be directed into an adult life that will make

them glorify God? We actually started to present to our children, as soon as they were old enough to understand, we'd read biographies of missionaries and other, you know, Christian heroes and so forth. And we tried to plant in them an awareness that there's no greater privilege than to be a martyr for Jesus Christ. Now, because it is a privilege, not everyone has it.

Not everyone can do it. I've made it very clear to them, I hope that I may have the privilege, but I can't be sure I will. God doesn't give that privilege to all.

But I would like my children to have a sense that if they have the privilege of giving up their lives for Jesus Christ, they will have had the greatest privilege that I'm aware of. And that is a vision that I would have for them. You know, I say, what, you want your kids to die? No one wants their kids to die, but they're going to.

Aren't your kids going to die? The question is, how are they going to die? For what cause are they going to die? Or for no cause at all? To me, a father has to have vision for his children so that he knows what things to trim out of their lives, what things to include in their lives. When Benjamin was real small, he was kind of a chubby little baby. He's not now chubby at all.

He's more like me, but I think he'd rather be chubby. But he's a little chubby baby. And people often said to him, oh, he's going to be a football player when he gets older.

I said, no, he's not. Oh, I offended some people that way. I said, you can't, you can't determine whether he's going to be a football player or not.

I said, well, if I have anything to do about it, I will. I don't want my son to grow up with those values. I don't want my son to think that that's what's important.

I want my son, if he has energy, I don't want him wasting it doing things that don't matter. That energy is a gift from God. It's a stewardship.

I want him to use every bit of it for God. Whether he will or not remains to be seen, but that is my vision. God has vision for his children.

Every father has to have vision for his children. Secondly, a second fatherly attribute of God is that he's a trainer and a disciplinarian of his children. Jesus brought that out, talking somewhat generically about fathers, but also especially about his relationship with the father.

In John chapter five, when he healed on the Sabbath and he took some heat for that. It says in John 5, 19, Jesus began to explain why he went ahead and healed on the Sabbath. Jesus answered and said to them, most assuredly, I say to you, the son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the father do for whatever he does, that is whatever the father does, the son also does in the same way.

Why? Because the father is apprenticing his son. The father wants to make sure he's the father has a vision for his son and he knows the son needs to be trained. The father does not expect the son just to grow up the way he's supposed to without training and to know instinctively all the things he's got to know for life.

The father shows the son how it is done and the son looked at the father and does it the same way. That's what Jesus said. For the father loves the son and shows him all things that he himself does.

The father trains his children. He trains his sons, both in this case, Jesus referring probably to the way fathers train their sons in an apprenticeship in a business, but that's not the most important training they receive. The father has to train the children in all the aspects of life because if the father does not do it, the children will be trained by someone else and that someone else may not share the father's vision.

Children will get their values by default if they don't get them on purpose. They will get them from their peers. They will get them from the musicians they listen to, from the movies they see, from the neighbor kids or whoever they're exposed to.

They will pick up their values. They'll pick up their sense of what's worth going for in this world. If they don't get it on purpose from their father, if they're not trained for it, then it doesn't mean they won't have any training.

They'll just get trained haphazardly and in a direction the father may not approve of. So God is actively hands-on training his children. We have a reference, of course, to this in a number of places, both in the Old and the New Testament.

One of the Old Testament passages that comes up and is quoted in the New is Proverbs chapter 3 and verses 11 and 12. It says, My son do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest his correction. For whom the Lord loves, He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.

That's when God corrects you, when He chastens you. Is that what you like? Do you like that? Probably not. My kids don't like it when I chasten them either.

It says in Hebrews, No chastening seems for the time present joyous, but rather grievous. Yet afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised by it or trained by it. God chastens His children because He's looking for that peaceable fruit that will eventually come forward.

And it's not pleasant at the time, and that's why we're told don't despise it. Don't faint under it. God does this to all the sons in whom He delights, not the sons He rejects, the sons in whom He delights.

Because a father delights in his son, he trains, he shapes, he corrects, and he disciplines

his son. That's what the Father does to us. That's what an earthy father needs to do too.

Another thing about God as a father that's a good role model for us is that He is impartial. And this is connected to His fatherhood directly in 1 Peter 1, verse 17. And if you call on the Father who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear.

Now, there's a place for reverence and fear of God because He is impartial. Now, what that means is that He doesn't cut His kids slack where He doesn't cut other people slack. If you call Him Father and you know that He judges impartially, that He rewards everyone impartially according to their own works, better pass the time here reverently and in fear.

Because, well, as Paul puts it elsewhere in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, he says that if we would chasten ourselves, we would not have, or if we judge ourselves, we would not have to be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord so that we will not be condemned with the world. What? Is there a possibility that I could be condemned with the world? Well, if God didn't chasten me, if God didn't shape me.

That's what Paul says. God judges me, He chastens me so that I, His child, will not be condemned later with the world because He's not going to cut His kids slack in areas that He won't cut other people slack. Some people think, oh, being a Christian means I can get away with things I couldn't get away with before because I'm under grace.

That's not the grace Paul taught. It's not the grace Jesus taught. In fact, it's not the grace anyone in the Bible taught.

The grace the Bible teaches is God gives me grace and that covers my past guilt and gives me enablement to live the way He wants me to live now. And where I fail again, there's still grace to cover. But it doesn't mean that since I have grace, I can now get away with stuff.

You don't get away with anything. You're fooling yourself. Be not deceived.

God is not mocked. What a man sows, he's going to reap it. And you can get forgiven, but you'll have consequences for your actions.

God will see to it that you will eat of the fruit of your own doings. The Bible says that so many times. Look up that phrase and see how many times that's in the Bible.

Those who sin are going to eat of the fruit of their own doings. That doesn't mean they're all going to go to hell because I've sinned and I'm forgiven, but I still eat of the fruit of my own doings sometimes. You don't get away with it.

The Bible doesn't tell you you get away with it. And your father cares too much about

you to let you get away with it. He is impartial.

If he's going to put consequences on an unbeliever. See, this is how it has to be. Here's a kid.

My son and another kid gets into a conflict. They come to me. My compassion is for my child, quite naturally, of course.

But here's another child who's making some kind of complaint. And I have to be impartial. I say, well, someone did something wrong here.

Now, if it's the neighbor's kid, good. I prefer it that way. But I have to be open about maybe it was my kid.

Maybe it's my kid who needs to get the rebuke. Maybe it's my kid who needs the correction. I don't know.

I mean, I have to be careful about my natural affection when it comes to considering disposition of justice. And God is that way. He has affection for his children, but he judges impartially.

He's a just father. Now, of course, his children have an edge over other people because they have his grace. They can do what he wants.

They even know what he wants. And therefore, they can avoid some of the judgment that the pagan who doesn't know what God wants and doesn't have the grace to do it isn't going to be able to avoid. But we have to remember that God, he's not just an indulgent, grandfatherly, nonjudgmental type of a guy.

He's a father who cares about the righteousness and justice and purity of his children. And he's going to do something about it. And the fact that we're his children doesn't mean he's going to show partiality towards and let us get away with stuff that other people can't get away with.

Another very important aspect of God's fatherliness I need to talk about a little bit here is his attentiveness to his children. Jesus said in Matthew 6, 8, when he said you don't have to use a lot of vain repetitions when you pray, he says, your father knows that you have need of these things before you ask him. He knows what you need before you know what you need or before it ever occurs to you to ask, how could he, you know, could I know what my children need before they know it? If I'm very attentive, yes.

I mean, they'll feel their needs eventually, but I may be able to anticipate them because I'm so attentive. I can say, okay, my kids are going to need new shoes here. They don't know it yet because they're not feeling the ground under their feet yet because there's still a little bit of leather there or rubber or whatever it is.

And I can anticipate they're going to need something before they even know they need it. But not if I'm not attentive. God is attentive to our needs and concerned about every little thing.

In Matthew chapter 10, this is a very important verse, I think, for getting a sense of the fatherly heart of God here. In Matthew 10 and verse 29 and 30, Jesus said, are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your father's will. Now, there's even a sparrow of much less consequence than you in God's estimation, as he says in verse 31, you're worth more than many sparrows.

Yet God is attentive so much so whenever the sparrow population changes by one individual, he knows. And it doesn't happen without his will. How can anything happen to you without his paying close attention to it and knowing it? And he says even the number of your hairs on your head are numbered, he says in the next verse.

Now, what's interesting about this, I think, is that in verse 29 of Matthew 10, he says, are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? Two sparrows for a penny was the going rate in the marketplace. But over in Luke in the parallel, in Luke chapter 12, verse 6, Jesus says, are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? Now, we get a little insight into the economics of first century Israel there. Sparrows were fairly worthless.

You could buy two for a penny or five for two pennies. What does that mean? It means that sparrows were so low regarded in value by the merchant who had them that he would throw one in for free as if worthless to him. If you just went to, if you bought four, buy four, get one free.

I mean, that fifth one is just the worthless premium that you get for buying four of them. Now, what I find interesting is that Jesus said in the parallel here over in Luke, he says, are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? And yet not one of them perishes without the will of your father. Even that fifth sparrow, that's not worth anything to the merchant selling it.

It's a freebie. But even that one, God is attentive. God knows when that sparrow dies.

It won't die without his will. I think parents, fathers need to be attentive, need to know what their children are doing, need to pay attention to the influences in their life. A lot of kids these days just disappear into their bedroom for hours at a time.

Parents don't even know what they're doing in there. I think parents have the right to intrude into the child's space and say, hey, what's going on? What are you doing? How have you been spending your time? What are you thinking about? What do you need? Is there anything I can do for you? And to attend closely to the specific needs of the child, that's what certainly the father does. If you never had a father who did that, you do now.

Another thing about God's fatherly attributes that Jesus emphasizes in John 16, I brought

these verses up last time, so I won't go into detail, but is that God is approachable. A father has got to be approachable. That doesn't mean that the children are allowed to interrupt many times a day over frivolous things, if the father's doing something important, but it does mean that the father takes his children's concerns seriously and is eager to hear what they are, is eager to spend time with the child if the Jesus said in that day you will ask in my name and I do not say that I will pray to the father for you.

For the father himself loves you because you have loved me and I believe that I came forth from God. The father himself loves you. Jesus said you can talk to him straight on.

I'm not going to go talk to him for you. You go to him yourself. He loves you.

He's approachable by you. You can go and see him in John 17 in verse 23. Jesus is praying.

He says, I am them and you and me that they may be made perfect in one and that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Jesus wants the world to figure something out, but I think we have to figure it out first. He wants the world to know that God has loved you as much as he loved Jesus.

Do you believe God loved Jesus? You say, well, obviously Jesus. Who wouldn't love Jesus? Well, some people don't, but God certainly does. Well, guess what? Could you believe that God loves you as much as he loves Jesus? Is God approachable by Jesus? Do you think Jesus could get an audience with him whenever he wants one? Obviously.

Well, then why couldn't you? You could too. If you come to him in Jesus' name, it is as if you were Jesus himself as far as God is concerned. He'll listen to you as freely.

He's as concerned about you as he is about Jesus. Jesus says, I want the world to know that you love them as much as you love me. Jesus tells us that God is an approachable father.

And then I realize we're running a little late. The last attribute of God I wanted to bring out is that he's sympathetic. Even though a father has got to be impartial and just, he can't help but being sympathetic toward his children.

One of my favorite verses bringing this out is actually in the Old Testament. One of the few father verses about God in the Old Testament. In Psalm 103, verses 13 and 14, as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him.

For he knows our frame. He remembers that we're dust. He's a disciplinarian.

He's impartial, but he knows what we're made of. He knows our feebleness. He doesn't reject us when we fail.

He's not even very surprised. He's on our side. He pities us.

Like a father pities a child. Did your father pity you? If he was good when he did, if he didn't, then you need to know that a father exists who is sympathetic. He's on your side.

And that sympathy is manifested in a couple of very important ways. One is in his eagerness to forgive when you fail. He knows your frame.

He remembers that you're dust. It is no great difficulty to him to forgive you when you come and apologize when you come and say you're sorry if you're sincere. It's a simple matter.

It's not like you have to twist his arm. Every father wants to forgive their child. It's hard to withhold it long enough to wait for them to apologize.

And that's what Jesus indicated when he told the parable of the prodigal son. What's that all about? That's about a son of a father who insulted the father, brought shame to his father, dishonored his father, alienated himself from his father. Of course, the father was fuming, angry, nurturing hostile thoughts toward his son every day.

Right? That's not the impression I get. That son was separate from his father because he did not. It was the son who was making the choice to stay away from the father.

When that son said, I will arise and go to my father and say to him, father, I've sinned against heaven and in your sight, and I'm no longer worthy to be called your son, but make me as one of your servants. The son rehearsed the speech. He finally went and came to his father.

His father saw him along the way and he ran out and fell on his neck and wept. And his son tried to recite the little speech. He got about halfway through.

And his father said this, stop the speech. Get the ring. Get the robe.

Kill the fatted calf. One of the ways, therefore, in which the sympathy of God as a father is seen is in his delighting in mercy, his eagerness to forgive. And secondly, as another aspect of his sympathy is his delight in generosity.

I've already made reference to what Jesus said in Matthew 7 and verse 11. If you earthly fathers being evil know how to give good things to your children, how much more? And we must not forget that that how much more is there for a reason? How much more will your heavenly father give good things to those who ask him? It's not just fathers do this. God does this.

It's more like fathers do this. They love to give good things to their children. Even very imperfect fathers take delight in seeing their kids supplied for and have affection lavished upon them, seeing their kids delight as they open the Christmas presents and it's just what they wanted.

Earthly fathers love it. But how much more your heavenly father is than your earthly father in this? God does not begrudge provision to you. He does not begrudge even luxury.

He's concerned about luxury. If you have too much of that, it can be an idol. It can ruin you.

And therefore, it's not always his will to give it, but he's not grudging. He loves to give. And I'll tell you something in my life.

I can say that God has never failed to provide for me. When I lived in the home of my earthly father, my earthly father took care of all my needs. When I moved out, my heavenly father's taking care of all my needs.

You might say, well, but what's so special about that? Well, it is special because I've never been profitably employed. I've been busy about my father's business, but I have not ever had a salary. I've never had a group of supporters.

I've raised five children. I own a house without a debt. I own a car without a debt.

I am amazed. I stand amazed. Because in 30 years of serving God without any guaranteed income, God has supplied more abundantly than my earthly father did.

Because my earthly father, he was a little more inclined to not let out money for luxuries. But my heavenly father has been very frivolous in his giving sometimes. Things I didn't need at all, but wanted.

And some things I never even thought to want. Never wanted to own a house, but he gave me that. It never occurred to me to want one.

He knows what you have needed before you ask. He's a God who delights in generosity. That's part of his sympathy for his children.

Now, I could close there because that's the end of my list of fatherhood attributes. I do want to make, real briefly, some practical application. I don't want you to think I'm unaware that we're late, but I just want to make a real quick practical application.

Because God is our father, there's four things I want to tell you real quickly. One is that we're secure. If a child has to walk in a dangerous part of town alone, he has reason to feel insecure.

If he walks with his father, he feels secure, whether his father is able to take on the gangs there or not. As far as he's concerned, his dad can take on anything. The fact of the matter is our dad can.

And we are secure because of that. Jesus said in John 10, 29, the father who gave them

to me is greater than all, and no one can pluck them out of my father's hand. My father's the biggest dude in town.

And I don't mean to be irreverent, but I mean it's like a child who's quite sure his dad can lick every other dad. I mean, his kid's not in touch with reality, but the fact is he thinks that way. And the fact is we are in touch with reality if we attribute that kind of power to the God who holds us in His hand.

Jesus said in Matthew 6, 31, Therefore, do not worry, saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what should we wear? For after all these things the Gentiles seek, and they might as well, they don't have a father. For your heavenly Father knows you have need of all these things, but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you. You're secure, financially secure, physically secure, eternally secure.

You're in God's hand. You stay there, you keep your hand in His, and there's nothing that can shake you loose. Okay, so the first practical ramification of knowing the fatherhood of God is that we are secure.

I almost said we can feel secure, which is true, but we are secure. And that's the only reason to feel secure. Kids can feel secure when they aren't, but we are.

Now you might as well feel that way. Secondly, because God's our father, second ramification, we can be natural about religion. That is, our religious life can be like a real relationship of a child and a father, rather than some kind of a hysterical, mystical, kind of spooky kind of thing that's based on some God that we have some concept of but have no relationship with.

In the sixth chapter of Matthew, in verses six through eight, Jesus said, but you, when you pray, go into your room and when you've shut the door, pray to your father who is in the secret place and your father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think that they'll be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them, for your father knows the things you have need of before you ask him.

Be natural with God. Don't be like the heathen who have to come up with ritualistic chants and so forth that have nothing to do with reality. Religion is out.

A relationship with your father is in. That's what Jesus came for, is that we'd have a relationship with our father. We were alienated like a prodigal son.

And he says, I'm here to bring you back to the father. No man can come to the father but through me. That's what Jesus wants us to do.

We can be natural about religion rather than ritualistic and silly like the heathen. A third

thing, third ramification, is that affliction becomes meaningful because the chastening of the Lord is purposeful. The unbeliever or the person who doesn't know is God, that person suffers and doesn't know why.

And what's worse, not only, I mean, Job didn't know why either, but it wasn't unpurposeful. The fact is that whether Job knew it or not, there was purpose in his suffering. God understood it.

That's all that mattered. But it was brought to him by his father's hand. Jesus said, the cup my father has given me, shall I not drink it? What a difference it makes.

It's not the cup that Judas is bringing me. It's not the cup that Caiaphas is sending me. It's not the cup that these soldiers are giving me.

It's the cup my father gave me. I will drink this. I embrace this.

I have a father. And this suffering, this affliction is meaningful to me. Oh God, it said the psalmist, I know that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

I'll tell you, there's meaning in that. There's no meaning in the afflictions of the suffering of the unbeliever. There's no sense in it.

But affliction becomes meaningful when we know God is the father who's carving us and shaping us and disciplining us. And finally, fourth ramification of all this, if God is our father, then it follows that all Christians are brothers and sisters. And while that might sound like a feel-good, liberal, fuzzy kind of thing to say, it's something we need to get down to realize.

And that is not just people in our fellowship, not just the people with our background, not just the non-charismatics or just the charismatics, not just the Calvinists or the Armenians, not just the whatever, but all people who call on the father out of a pure heart are our brothers and our sisters, and there aren't any alienated brothers and sisters in the family. I can't think of anything that would grieve me more than if my children grew up and two of them were not on speaking terms with each other. The Bible says, he that loves him that begot, loves him also that is begotten of him.

It says that in 1 John chapter five, you love God, you love everyone he loves. You love God, you love all those who are begotten of him. You can't love God and not love his brothers.

We don't have that luxury. Paul said in Galatians 6, 10, as you have opportunity, endeavor to do good to all men, but especially those of the household of faith. This is a family here.

You have first priority in your list of priorities to show goodness to the household of faith.

Peter said in 1 Peter chapter three, love as brethren. Love in other words, because you are brethren.

In Mark chapter three, verse 33, and following Jesus said, who are my mother and who are my brothers? Behold, my mother, my brothers, those who do the will of my father in heaven, they are my mother and my brothers, my sisters. They're my family. Some of them might have different doctrines.

Some of them might have different practices. Some of them might not even like me, but that doesn't matter. They're my brothers and they ain't heavy if they're my brother.

If you think it hard to love another Christian, then I suspect you do not understand the fatherhood of God and the family into which we have come. Steve has alluded a couple of times already today to what went on over at the Manley's property. Last couple of days, a number of Christian men came and built a house there.

You'll hear more about that next week. But what's so amazing about this, and I observed also when we went to Kurt's house and built a lean-to to cover his wood, how that there was a smaller group there building a lean-to and a smaller group was needed than building a whole house. But the fact is, this wasn't even all people who went to the same church.

It was just people who said, hey, here's a brother who needs something. I'm available. And there were people there who don't go to any church.

They're home churchers. There's some who go to other churches. And it's just a marvelous thing to see people give up their whole weekend to go out and build a house for a brother who doesn't even go to the same church they go to.

Well, why would they do that? Because they have the same father. And so I don't suspect that anything I've said is really new to anyone here who's been a Christian for any period of time, but to call attention to the Father, to introduce you to your Father may be of help to some. I suspect it would be of help in some way or another to everyone.

And that is why I believe Jesus made that the focus of his entire teaching. And we'll only give this time to it today. you