

Enjoying Your Father

Prayer & Partnership

Matthew 6:25-34; 7:7-12

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Bethany Church

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In this sermon series, I'm trying to help you better understand exactly who you are, grasp reality and meet your challenge confidently. I want you to *embrace your purpose*. Only as you recognize your special relationship as God's own child and companion and converse with your Father can you fulfill your purpose and potential. I want you to *empower your leaders*. You are not an island in this world. Much of your future hinges on the decisions and judgments of your spiritual and civic leaders. God would not call you to pray for leaders if it made no difference. Your prayers for me will make a difference in what you experience. (Right now, there are people praying for both you and me; and what you and I are experiencing at this moment is being altered by God). I want you to recognize the battlefield upon which we live and to realize that prayer with your heavenly Father is a world class weapon. I want you to *enjoin the battle*. Today, I want to help you *enjoy your heavenly Father*. I want you to relish your special relationship.

Many of us have trouble relating to God even though we affirm what we were taught about God. In Sunday School we were told that God is love and memorized the Bible verse that declares so. Nevertheless, we find ourselves

distrusting God. Somewhere we learned to worry instead of rely upon our Father. For some the hindrance is guilt. Others suffer from unresolved anger. Regardless of what we affirm about God, our fear, guilt and anger point to attitudes and beliefs that actually prevent us from enjoying the Creator of this universe who passionately loves us as our Father. If you are prone to worry, you have a problem. You've embraced some lies. If you struggle with guilt, you have a problem. You suffer from lies. If you regret your temper, you have a problem. You don't understand your Father.

Years ago, God revealed to me several things that interfered in my relationship with God and hindered others in their faith as well. I found that I was crippled by faith robbers. I saw one especially at work in a friend. Although he was a tremendous, committed Christian man, I noticed in him a reservoir of anger. It was rooted in his feelings toward his father, who while building a career and amassing wealth, had not been available. I was with my friend when he realized that his divine Papa was not like. God had always been close. That evening was pivotal in his life.

Last Spring a study was published that examined the life of famous atheists and believers of the past few centuries. In each case the atheists shared one thing in common, a poor or non-existent relationship with a father. In each case, the famous believer had either a biological father or a spiritual father who had acted as a mentor and friend. The study concluded that our relationships with parents, especially our fathers, significantly affect our attitude towards God.

That fits with my experience in ministry. Disappointments with *parents*, rejection or betrayal from *peers*, traumatic or disillusioning events from the *past* and *personal* doubts about ourselves rob us of the trust that God deserves. If you are not enjoying intimacy with God or are motivated to pray, you've probably suffered loss of trust from one of these faith-robbers.

Jesus set about correcting his follower's picture of God. He emphasized their unique *relationship* with God. He pointed to the birds and the lilies and reminded them that God glories in his creation. Jesus then asked, "How much more important are you?" You are God's own child. God is your Father. We have a unique relationship with God.

Jesus talked of the unique *character* of our Father. When a child is hungry and asks for bread and meat, no parent serves a rock or a slithering snake. Jesus told his followers that as parents, they, who by nature are often destructive, know how to bless their children. How much more, he asked, will the divine Papa, who has no destructive impulse, bless and honor his children who make requests of him? God's character is unique and different than ours.

Jesus corrects our picture of God in that he alone is our unique *window* to God. "Whoever has seen me," declared Jesus, "has seen the Father." Did Jesus go around hurting or healing people? There's your divine Papa. Did Jesus ignore or serve people? There's your Papa. Did Jesus devalue or treasure the least? There's your Papa. Did Jesus tell people not to bother God or did he invite them to even pester God in prayer? There's your Papa. In fact, if you are alert, I believe you will identify six actions that your Father is taking with you.

The first is *affirmation*. Your divine Papa affirms both you and your feelings. God is both sensitive and strong. He urges his children to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice because that is what he does. When Jesus wept over Jerusalem, those were your Father's tears. When Jesus wept at Lazarus's grave side, he shed your Father's tears. Have you recognized your Father's tears for you? God is sensitive and passionate about you. Sometimes God will send to you a person who embodies his tears and heart for you. Several weeks ago, I wept at a church council meeting. I was a little upset with myself. But later I realized I was not weeping for myself or even weeping in relief. I felt the pain that was being experienced by many and I hurt for them. God was unveiling his tears and heart for them through my swollen eyes and runny nose. I wished my Papa would have warned me, but I want God to know that I am available to do that... because God values you and your feelings.

Your Father acts in *acceptance*. God showed his love for us, the Bible says, in that while you and I were still rebelling, still sinning, Christ died for us. We are called to accept others just as God accepted us.

Your Father acts in *appreciation*. We share with Jesus the same Father who periodically expressed his love and pleasure for Jesus. God often sends messengers to reveal his love and

pleasure with us. Do you realize God prompts people to thank and express pleasure with you?

Your Father acts in *affection*. When has someone gently put their arms about you and told you that he or she cares? They are responding to your Father's love. Our divine Papa is the kind of father who runs to his wayward child, throws his arms about him and kisses him. Can you accept your divine Father's affection? Or do you discount and send his representatives away?

Two other words describe your divine Papa: *availability* and *accountability*. God is rich in love and time for you. Your burdens concern him all the time. He is always available. Additionally, he holds you accountable. You won't get away with anything. He loves you too much and wants so much for you. God may tolerate things in people who reject him, but not with you. He's shaping you as his own son or daughter who'll share all his business.

Are you connecting with your Papa? Are you recognizing his messengers and his hand on your life? There are three things, an A-B-C, that can help you do that and turbo-charge your faith. **A - Acknowledge your pain.** Admit your fears and consider where they come from. **B - Begin the process of confession and forgiveness.** Talk to your Father about your lack of trust and why. Confess your faults and experience forgiveness. Forgive those who have wounded you. Know your divine Papa waits to heal you. **C - Celebrate the goodness of your divine Papa.** Identify his hand in your life. Creatively, give him thanks.

Can you imagine what prayer is like the more you grasp what your Father is like? It becomes such a sweet and powerful thing. You actually crave conversation with your Father. Moreover, you find yourself and every relationship changing and growing as you pray.