

Our Father God

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Date: 24 May 2020

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Can I add my word of welcome? My name's Martin Ayers and I'm the Rector of St Silas Church. And whether you've been coming to St Silas many years or you just tuned in for the first time to us this morning on YouTube, it's great that you could join us. We're continuing in a series as a church family looking at knowing the living God.

So let's ask for God's help as we seek to know him better. Let's bow our heads and I'll lead us in a prayer. We praise you, mighty God and loving Heavenly Father, that you are glorious, powerful, majestic and holy.

We pray that you would speak to each one of us this morning, that where we're on the wrong track, you would lead us and correct us. Where we're being foolish, you would give us wisdom.

That where we're distressed or grieving, you give us comfort. And that where we're afflicted or in despair, you would give us hope. For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, we've come this morning to this theme of God our Father. And you could say, I think fairly, that this is one of the two or three most important things that God ever says to us.

[1 : 18] This is what Jim Packer says in his book, *Knowing God*. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child and having God as his Father.

If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.

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[3 : 16] Father is the Christian name for God.

Father is the Christian name for God. God bless the John. Father is the Christian name for God. We need to hear it if we're able to say, as many of us are, you know, actually I had a really good dad, and it's wonderful that I therefore have a model from which I can think my heavenly father is better than that in so many ways.

We need to hear it if we have to say, well, actually my own dad disappointed me in this way or in that way. But that's okay, because I know that my heavenly father will be different.

Or whether we need to say, actually, I never had a dad. One of the most powerful moments I had on a youth camp I was helping to leave was when my friend Adam addressed all the teenagers on the camp, and he said, you know, I never knew my dad.

You could say, really, I never had a dad. But it is okay, because I've come to know God is my heavenly father, and he will always be close to me, and he'll never let me down.

[4 : 47] We're going to think first about the adoption of the father. There's a sense in which we talk about every human being as a child of God. We use that kind of language, and Acts 17, 28 suggests that connection, that because we're made by God, in one sense we're his children.

The issue is that that's not the primary way the scriptures talk about being children of God. And the reason for that is that we've all rejected that fatherhood of God.

We've rebelled against it. We've run away from the family home. We've done the spiritual equivalent of divorcing our parents. And God's response to that in the gospel is that he offers us that we can come to him, and he will adopt us as his children.

He'll welcome us. The apostle John introduces his gospel account of Jesus' life with this magnificent prologue, and the climax of that prologue is John 1, verse 12.

Having just talked about how Jesus, who came into the world, was rejected by so many people, he says, John 1, 12, Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the

right to become children of God.

[6 : 10] And there was no twisting God's arm for this. There's no sense in which, when God the Father opens the door to welcome us home, he looks at us coming in and picks out one or two of us and says, What, you as well?

Oh, go on then. And reluctantly allows us back. Now, when Jesus wanted to convey to the religious leaders of his day the attitude of God towards people who turn back to him, he told the story in Luke 15 of the two lost sons.

And there's the younger brother who runs away, and he squanders the inheritance. Then he comes to his senses, and he heads home. And he knows on his way home, what he plans to say, because he knows he doesn't deserve to be still part of the family.

He plans to say, make me like one of your hired men. And Jesus says, when the father sees the son, he runs towards him, throws his arms around him, and kisses him.

And then the celebration, the feast. And Jesus says this, In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents, who turns back to God.

[7 : 26] The pleasure of the father at having us turn back to him and become his sons and daughters. Being part of the family carries with it responsibilities, but this adoption is liberating.

God sets us free. He redeems us to be his children. In Galatians chapter 4, Paul describes our journey, if you become a Christian, from slavery to sonship.

Because you are his sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts. The spirit who calls out, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but God's child.

And since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. It's provocative, isn't it? The Bible says before we become sons, we are slaves.

There seems to be two different ideas Paul's referring to there in Galatians. One is that we might be slaves to religion, to a sort of churchianity, where because we've not grasped that God is our father in Christ, we think that we have to obey all these religious rules to be accepted.

[8 : 37] Another way we might be a slave is if we've moved away from God. What we do instead is we enslave ourselves to something else that we think will give us what only God can give us.

So we might take a good thing, popularity or success or comfort, but we enslave ourselves to it and we serve it. And the offer from Jesus is come home to God.

You can be set free to rest in his unconditional love. So spiritually, we're a bit like Rey in the Star Wars saga.

She introduces herself in the ninth episode in The Rise of Skywalker. She introduces herself to a creature who says they would be honored to know her family name.

And she says, I don't have one. I'm just Rey. But at the end of the movie, with having become a Jedi, Rey is at the home where Luke Skywalker grew up.

[9 : 39] And a lady goes past and says, who are you? And she says, I'm Rey. And the lady says, Rey who? And she looks up and sees Leia and Luke.

And she says, I'm Rey Skywalker. And it's this coming of age moment. She's saying, I finally know who I am. I've got a family now.

Well, so it is spiritually for us when we come to Christ. That we could say, you know, I know who I am now. Spiritually, I am a child of the living God.

It's a wonderful reality. Robert Peterson says this. The doctrine of adoption is as warm as the Bible gets. I can hardly think of anything more comforting, more nourishing, more uplifting than the glorious truth that when we trust in Christ, we are made into the sons and daughters of the creator God.

That's our first point, the adoption of our father. And that status is there to be experienced. So our second point, the closeness. The father. In Luke 11, Jesus goes off to pray.

[10 : 52] He comes back. The disciples say to him, Lord, teach us to pray. He says to them, when you pray, say, father. This is the primary image to govern how we relate to God.

And Romans 8 verse 16 says, the spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. In other words, the Holy Spirit gives us a subjective reassurance that we can call on God as our father.

We can know his closeness, his dependability, his help. God invites us to take hold of God. God invites us to take hold of this relationship, to experience it.

It means we can walk through life sharing it with God. Here's Jim Packer again. This is momentous knowledge. There is unspeakable comfort in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for my good.

There is tremendous relief in knowing that his love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion him about me in the way I'm so often disillusioned about myself.

[12:14] We can't mess this up. And what an encouragement this is as well, to ask things boldly of God. Children ask their parents for things all the time.

All day they ask as things go wrong, as they want things. Dad, could I have this? Dad, could I have that? Dad, look at this. Without any worry or shame about that. And Jesus says in Luke 11, 13, to parents, If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

Jesus calls us out for being too slow to ask God for things. Sometimes we're held back as though we think, I don't want to bother God or he won't be interested in this, or I don't want to look like I'm asking for too much.

When in reality, we should be casting our burdens on God's shoulders because it demonstrates as we ask him that we trust that he is a generous God, a great provider and giver.

But what about the times when we don't get from him what we wanted, when we're disappointed? Well, our third point, the discipline of our Father.

[13:36] Just imagine for a moment a child who always gets everything they want. We have words, don't we, for children like that.

If a child, if the parent never says no, we call out parenting like that. We'll say things like, well, how are they going to get on in the real world? What are they going to become?

The truth is, even though a child might not like it, when a loving parent says no to their child, it is for their good. And we know that about human parenting. The issue is, we have to learn that lesson about the way that God is our Father.

Hebrews 12, verse 7, Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as his children. And the writer there, he quotes Proverbs 3, and says we should be encouraged by it.

It says in Proverbs 3, The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. I don't know what you think about that, but I think Hebrews 12 there turns on its head the way that we tend to think about suffering and hardship.

[14:47] We experience hardship, as we are doing in this pandemic and in lockdown, and we think things like, Is God even there? Is God really good?

How could God let this happen to me, if he's really for me? Hebrews chapter 12 says, If you're a Christian, If you're a Christian, then hardship is a sign to you that you are a child of God.

He's treating you as a good father treats his children. And by discipline there, it doesn't just mean punishment for doing wrong. Discipline is a much broader concept than that.

It's about any challenges that come a child's way. As a good parent trains them for life in the real world. It's the walk up a mountain that is really hard, and you grumble about it, but afterwards you can see why it was a good thing to do.

It's the exam or the competition that you're entered for. The challenges. Discipline is the not being wrapped in cotton wool approach to parenting. It's about being trained, stretched, supported by a father who is ambitious to see us become the very best we could be.

[15:59] It's that caring, controlled exposure to difficulty to build our character. In Hebrews, the writer then compares discipline from God, our father, with discipline from our human dads.

Verse 10, They, our earthly dads, disciplined us for a little while as they thought best. But God disciplines us for our good in order that we may share in his holiness.

So God, because he is wise and good, he will never test you more than you can bear. He'll never get this wrong. At the same time, he does care more about our holiness than our happiness.

So does knowing all of that make it easy then to go through difficulty? Well, verse 11 is so realistic, isn't it? No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.

And yet what a difference it makes. To experience, to endure difficulty and disappointment. And trust that God is a good father who, in his wisdom, will accomplish his good purposes through it because he's committed to us as his children.

[17:19] End of verse 11. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who've been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

So folks, these are difficult days during the pandemic and lockdown. The temptation is to think God is not good or God is not there. And we need to speak this truth to ourselves.

However you feel today, God is your good father if you are trusting Christ. And he lovingly disciplines his children. John Newton wrote this, Everything is necessary that God sends. Nothing can be necessary that he withholds. Could you argue with your own heart about that? As you think about your own disappointments.

Your disappointments even with God. Don't listen to the feelings of your heart, but argue with it. The truth. Everything is necessary that God sends.

[18:29] Nothing can be necessary that he withholds. He's the perfect father. And he's preparing us for a terrific future. That's our fourth point. The inheritance of the father.

The Bible connects our status with our future. Our identity as children of God with the guarantee that he will see us through this. To be with him forever.

Why? Because we are royal children. It's extraordinary. Romans 8, 17. Now if we are children, and that's a kind of since we are children. Since we are children, then we are heirs.

Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. If indeed we share in his sufferings. In order that we may also share in his glory. And that inheritance that we are co-heirs of with Christ.

Is God himself. Being with him. And the pleasure that will bring us. And it's the new creation. With our brother Jesus Christ. It's the inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

[19:32] Folks, these are the privileges of being children of the living God. How did we land on our feet like this? Well there's only one place I can find.

As I looked at the Gospels this week. There's only one place I could find. Where Jesus prays. And he doesn't call God Father. It's on the cross.

My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? As the only perfect son. Was thrown out of the presence of his father.

Because it's what we deserved. So that the father could give his son willingly for that mission. And bring us home.

So that on the third day. Risen. The Lord Jesus says to Mary. Go to my brothers. And tell them. I'm ascending to my father.

[20:30] And your father. To my God. And your God. He's gone now to prepare a place for us. In his father's house. Where he assures us. There are many rooms.

1 John chapter 3 verse 1. See what a great love the father has lavished on us. That we should be called children of God. And that is what we are.

Let's pray together. Our father we praise you. That you are father. Thank you for your adoption. By your grace in Christ. In our joys and sorrows. Would we experience and enjoy your closeness. As we pray. When we think about our hardships.

Would we trust your goodness and wisdom. As you work in us for your praise and glory. And for our good. We think about our disappointments.

[21:31] Father help us to trust your fatherly care. In our frustrations. Would you set.

Our hope fully. On the inheritance you're keeping in heaven for us. And in our words. And in our work. And in our hearts. Would you help us to bear the family likeness.

To be holy. Because you are holy. And you are our father. We ask for your name's sake. Amen.