

Sermon "Our Heavenly Father's Character"

Proverbs 16:9 says the mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. I had planned to begin a series this morning on the seven habits of highly effective Christians as the January newsletter indicated. That was what my mind had planned, but the Lord directed my steps in another direction. After spending a few hours in prayer one morning this past week, I sensed the Lord leading me to continue the theme of prayer that we looked at last Sunday. Beginning today and continuing for several weeks ahead I believe the Lord wants me to do a sermon series on prayer based on the Lord's prayer.

Last week I mentioned that prayer is one way that we can cultivate our relationship with God. The quality of our prayer life is greatly influenced by our understanding of the character of God. The more accurately we understand the character of God, the better our relationship with God will be and the better our prayer life will be.

When Jesus taught us to pray in what we call "The Lord's Prayer", he told us to address God as Father as we see in **Matthew 6:9** "**Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven...**

Jesus could have told us to address God in many other ways besides Father. He could have told us to pray, Our Savior who is in heaven. Or Our Friend who is in heaven. Or Our Lord who is in heaven. Or any other number of titles for God. But he taught us to address God as father when we pray. **The more accurately we understand the character of our heavenly father, the better our relationship with him will be and the better our prayer life will be.**

We can learn about the character of our heavenly father by studying Scripture. What is another way that we can learn about the character of our heavenly father? In addition to what we learn from Scripture, we learn about the character of our heavenly father from our relationship with our parents or primary caregivers when we were growing up. Parents and primary care givers have the responsibility of reflecting God's character. We see this in Genesis which tells us that man is created in the image of God. If our primary care givers bore that image accurately while we were in our formative years, then we will be in a better place to relate to God as he really is. But none of us gets through childhood without experiencing some distortion of our understanding of the character of God due to the failures and limitations of our primary care givers. Those of us who are parents know that parenting is difficult and that we all fall short of perfectly bearing the image of our heavenly father. As a result, we can have many inaccurate ideas about our heavenly father's character which can negatively influence our relationship with him and our prayer life. Some of these inaccurate ideas can be difficult to detect, but God can bring them to our awareness directly or through others. Here are some questions that may shed light on our understanding of the character of God: Do you feel adored by God?

Do you feel that he takes pleasure in you? Do you believe he has good plans for your life? Or, do you see God as giving you meat and potatoes, but never dessert. Do you think of him as holding a stick over your head to come down on you when you mess up?

As we explore what our heavenly father is like this morning, I hope you will deal with any inaccurate ideas you have of him that you may have picked up from your primary care givers' influence.

Before we look at what Scripture teaches about our heavenly father, we are first going to consider the question, what is a father? When we look at our heavenly father described in Scripture, and look at earthly fathers who bear his image, we see that a father has many roles. Three primary roles are the following: **progenitor, protector, and provider**. We are going to look at each of these three now.

First, a father is a progenitor. Now there is a word we don't use everyday! You may wonder why I used such a weird word. Because I wanted to be a professional preacher. A progenitor is an originator, someone who brings something forth. Just like an earthly father brings forth a child, our heavenly father brought us forth as his children. We read about this in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 8:6

6 yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him.

All things, including all of us, come from God the Father. Our heavenly father is our progenitor. Our heavenly father created us, loves us, and is glad we are here. An understanding of this can motivate us to come to our heavenly father in prayer because we know we are loved and accepted.

We all have different experiences that confirm how welcome we were from birth through the present. Regardless of whether your parents wanted you to come into the world or not, your heavenly father wants you here. God thought you up, and made sure that you got here regardless of the circumstances of your birth. Our Scripture from 1 Corinthians says that your heavenly father brought you into this world. Regardless of how things may have looked from a human standpoint, your coming in the world was no accident. Your heavenly father celebrated your birth and your coming into the world. Your heavenly father wants you in this world. Knowing that your heavenly father loves you this way can strengthen your relationship with him and can motivate you to come to him in prayer.

In addition to being our progenitor, our heavenly father is also our protector. He actively keeps us from harm as we see in the book of psalms.

Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.

God is our refuge, a help in time of trouble. The Hebrew idea of a refuge is a shelter, a stronghold, a fortress, a place of safety. Like being outside when a thunderstorm hits and running into your home for safety. God is our safe house around us that protects us. Again, our understanding of the character of our heavenly Father as protector is influenced by our experience with our primary care givers. What kind of protectors were your primary care givers? Did they really understand you and how you needed to be protected or were they out of touch with your struggles and vulnerabilities? As a child, did you feel that your primary care givers were keeping their eyes on you to step in and protect you when you needed it? Regardless of how well our primary care givers protected us, our heavenly father wants us to know that he wants to protect us. Our heavenly father wants us to come to him and ask him for protection.

God is not only progenitor and protector, but also provider as Jesus tells us in Matthew.

Matthew 6:25-26

25 “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

26 “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?

Just like our heavenly father provides for birds, he will provide for us his children who are worth so much more than birds. How well did your primary care givers provide for your physical and emotional needs? Were your primary care givers emotionally close or distant? Did they freely express affection or were they emotionally cold and reserved? How about your needs for direction? Were your primary care givers there to provide counsel when you needed to make an important decision? Your expectations of God’s provision for you will be influenced by how you were provided for by your primary care givers. Regardless of how well your primary care givers provided for you, your heavenly father wants you to know that he wants to provide for your physical needs, your emotional needs, and your needs for counsel.

By studying our heavenly father’s character in Scripture, we can correct misconceptions we may have about his attitudes toward us. The more accurately we understand the character of our heavenly father, the better our relationship with him will be and the better our prayer life will be. When we understand and experience our heavenly father as the perfect progenitor, protector, and provider we can feel more free to express a deep and affectionate love toward him as a young child would express his love toward his earthly father by saying Daddy or Papa.

This was how Jesus called out to his father when he faced the greatest trial of his life, the cross, in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the despair of that moment Jesus cried out to his heavenly father, Abba, which translated in English would be a title of endearment such as daddy or papa. We see this in Mark's gospel.

Mark 14:36

36 And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will."

Like Jesus, we are also God's children who can express the same loving title of endearment to our heavenly father as we read about in Romans.

Romans 8:15

15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

Our heavenly father wants us to cry out to him from a heart of deep affectionate love: abba, daddy, papa. What is important is not so much the words we use as much as the attitude of warmth and sense of closeness that we express. Do you relate to your heavenly father this way? This is available to all of us. As we open our hearts, and express to our heavenly father how we feel about him, we can find these types of expressions coming out. This is one reason why Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father who is in heaven..."