

Our Father Who Rules from Heaven

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of consistency in our Christian walk to maintain a strong testimony. It highlights the need to have a solid grip on the Christian life, using the illustration of our hand to represent six key aspects for consistency. The foundation is knowing God as our Father in heaven, understanding His intense love for us, and His desire for us to become like Jesus through trials and discipline.

Scripture: Matthew 6:9, John 17:23, Hebrews 12:7, Psalms 141:5

Topics: "Consistency in Faith", "The Father's Love and Discipline"

Description

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Transcript

The great need for us when we are witnesses for Christ is to be consistent, not up and down. That ruins our testimony. You wouldn't go to a shop to buy something if the supplies they give are not of the same quality.

One day it's very good, another time you go and buy that same thing, it's bad. Another time it's good. You lose confidence.

I feel that the world around can lose confidence in us if our Christianity is not consistent. So we must strive, all of us, for consistency. Even if it's not at a very high level, even if it's a low level, that we are consistent.

And slowly we grow. We can't expect overnight growth. Growth is slow but it should be consistent.

That is the will of God. And I was thinking of sharing a few things this week and in the coming weeks on having a solid grip on the Christian life. And I thought of using the illustration of our hand.

What is it that makes us get a solid grip on something? We can hold something with two fingers and it won't be a very solid grip. Somebody can pull it out easily. With more fingers it's better.

But when you have all, God's made our hand in such a way that we can grip it solid. And that's what helps us to be consistent in our Christian life, if we keep that solid grip. What grips this bottle, for example, is first of all the palm.

You can't do it without the palm. And then the five fingers. So I want to use that as an illustration of six things that will enable us to have a solid grip on the Christian life.

And the first of all is knowing God as our Father in heaven. If you turn to Matthew chapter 6, Jesus said, this is absolutely new to the disciples that spent all their life in the synagogues praying, Oh God, Lord God. They wouldn't use the name Jehovah because they're not allowed to use that name.

But it was Almighty God, Lord God, and all that. And all of a sudden Jesus comes and says, you got to pray differently. When you pray, he said in Matthew chapter 6, pray then, verse 9, in this way.

He earlier said, you must not pray like the Gentiles, verse 7. Don't be like them, verse 8. And we could even say, don't even pray like you've been praying all these years under the old covenant. Pray then in this way. And in that prayer, the most important sentence is the first one.

You know, Jesus often said that if you don't have faith, you'll get nothing from God. James says that very clearly. If you go and pray without faith, don't expect to get anything from God.

So that first sentence is laying the foundation for faith in prayer. That's what Jesus was doing. He said, when you pray, pray like this.

And he wasn't saying we got to repeat it. It's not a prayer just to be repeated monotonously, like playing a tape recorder back, but pray then in this way. That's what he said in verse 9, which means this must be the pattern of all your praying, even if it's not in exactly these words.

And the other question is, how often are we supposed to pray like this? I don't mean in the exact words, but in this way. I believe the Lord meant us to pray like this daily. And you can get that in that prayer itself, because the word daily comes in the middle of that prayer.

Pray then in this way. And one of the things he told us to pray for was, give us this day our daily bread. So that means tomorrow I have to pray again for my daily bread.

I'm not praying for the whole week. I'm not praying for the whole month. I'm praying for today.

Pray then in this way. And so, I believe this is a pattern in which all our prayers should be patterned after this. Every day, small prayers, long prayers must be patterned after this.

And the primary thing is, our father, who art in heaven. And there are two things there. When we call him our father, we know him as one who loves us.

Jesus took so many illustrations and verses to explain how loving our heavenly father was. I mean the story of the prodigal son illustrates it so well. A boy who had wasted all his father's wealth.

And comes back with nothing. And he came back because he was in need of food. Remember that.

He didn't come back because out there in the pig's farm he got convicted. Oh, I've hurt my dad. What he said was, what rotten food I'm eating here, what the pigs are eating.

But in my father's house, even the servants get better food. Let me go back. And the wonderful thing I see in that story is that the father welcomes a sinner even when he comes back for some earthly need.

He may not come back initially with a great desire for repentance. There must be repentance, sure, turning around. But that awareness of how terrible sin is and to give up sin does not usually come to us right at the beginning.

I know when I was born again, I was not horrified by sin. I was really born again. But it took time for me to see how much Jesus suffered to free me from sin.

God accepted me when I came back. Maybe I came back for bread. But he accepted me.

This is the father we come to. Never feel that your heavenly father will accept you only if you come with the most spiritual of reasons. He wants you to get there.

He wants you to get the PhD, but you can start in the kindergarten. It's no problem. And if you come with, he's so happy when you come to him.

What he wants us to do is come to him. Our father who are in heaven, our father means one who loves us intensely. And when he says in heaven, it indicates that he runs the universe.

Meaning he can do anything. So these are the two things on which faith is based. Our faith is based in the fact that I'm praying to one who loves me intensely.

Who will accept me even if I'm coming for bread. If I'm coming for healing, he'll accept me. He won't sort of say, no, no, no, are you coming really to live a holy life? Are you seeking to become like Christ? That's not what he is.

He's so happy that you come as you are. And then he will lead you into the heights of glory. So that assurance that the father accepts me just as I am.

Many times Jesus told his disciples, the father loves you. And I think of another instance in John 14. Where they'd heard so much about the father throughout those three and a half years.

That we read in John 14. Philip was one of the disciples asked Jesus in John 14 verse 8. Lord, show us the father. And that's enough for us.

I mean, he'd heard so much about the father already in three and a half years. And Philip says, you presented such a wonderful picture of the father. Please show him to us just once.

And Jesus says, have I been so long with you? And yet have you not known me, Philip, verse 9. If you've seen me, you've seen the father. How can you say, show us the father? In other words, Jesus was the exact perfect representation of the father. If you want to know what the father is like, just look at Jesus.

You've got to understand that. And see the context in which he said it. He had just, this is the last supper, by the way.

And you know what Jesus did at the last supper? He took that basin of water and washed the disciples' feet, including the feet of Judas Iscariot. And let me paraphrase the words in John 14, 9. Philip, did you see what I did just now? That's the father. If you want to know what the father is like, this is what he wants

to do to you.

He wants to sit at your feet and wash it. Humility. The humility of God is something we must be gripped by.

I believe the reason why so many Christians are proud is because they have not seen the humility of Jesus or the humility of the father. The father, if you see it once, you'll be so thoroughly ashamed of any type of arrogance or pride or looking down on someone or boasting in something that you've accomplished or feeling that you're superior to another. These are all indications that people have not seen the father.

The father is Jesus sitting at the disciples' feet, washing their feet and telling them, you know, you're the ones who are at the table. I'm a servant. That's the father.

And a true servant of God, a true disciple of Jesus will become more and more like that. We don't start like that. We start as sinners who are saturated with the pride of Lucifer the devil in us, which he communicated to Adam and which we've all inherited.

Every child born is born with pride and the feeling of, I'm the most important person. You see that in little children. And we grow up with that.

It's the spirit of the devil. It's the thing that it was the first sin that came into the universe that destroyed him from being the highest angel to become the devil. Once you see that, and I feel that a lot of Christians haven't seen it.

If you see it, it'll shatter all your high thoughts about yourself or wanting to show that you're superior to others or even looking down on someone, for example, who does not have the victory over sin that you have. That's this very subtle form of pride that can come in new covenant believers who understood what it is to overcome sin, that we look down on someone who doesn't have that victory. Then you haven't seen the new covenant.

Then you haven't seen the father. If the father sees somebody who hasn't got victory, he sees them as somebody who's got dirty feet. What do you do then? What did Jesus do when he saw the dirty feet? He didn't just criticize them for their dirty feet.

He didn't just say, hey, my feet are clean, yours are dirty. No, he went and cleaned it. That'll be the attitude of a person who's really been gripped by the humility of God and the humility of Jesus, that he will never look down on someone who doesn't have what he have.

Have you got victory over some bad habit? Wonderful. You see somebody indulge in that habit, say, Lord, is there something I can do to help them to be free from it? Instead of saying, Lord, I thank you that I'm not like other people. This is one of the greatest dangers that faces new covenant believers and new covenant churches.

Do you know the Pharisees started out with a desire for purity and to be separated and to be holy, and they ended up arrogant and looking down on others. So remember that when you pray, our father who are in heaven, it's a father who is stooped down to cleanse us. I often say that in relation to the conflicts.

Whenever there's a conflict with you and another brother or between a husband and a wife, any type of conflict, I ask this question, who should take the first step? If you have a problem with a brother, who

should take the first step? Well, the answer is, follow the example of our heavenly father. God had a conflict with us. We were the cause of it, 100%.

I mean, in earthly conflicts, no conflict is the problem 100% on one side. Always there's some percentage of problem on the other side because we are all, I've got a flesh. But this is one conflict in which the problem was 100% our side and God was completely free of it.

And he took the first step. The one who had not been even had even 1% cause for that conflict took the first step. That is our father.

And once you see God as a father like this, you'll be like him yourself. The Holy Spirit will make you like that. So it's very, very important to have a consistent Christian life to begin with seeing God as our loving father in heaven.

And you know, you can understand this. Now what I'm explaining to you now, you've got it in your mind. But the Holy Spirit alone can make it real to you.

So in a conflict, whether two brothers have a conflict, why did God take the first step? Because he was more spiritual. So whenever two brothers have a conflict, who's going to take the first step towards reconciliation? The one who is more spiritual. Always, the one who is more spiritual may have caused only 1% of the problem.

The other one is 99%. But the one who is more spiritual takes the first step towards reconciliation. Because that is the example of God Almighty.

So our heavenly father, father in heaven who loves us and who can do everything. This is the father we come to in prayer and this is the first thing we must be assured of. So John 17, 23 is a great verse in this connection, which you've often heard me quote and I'll never get tired of quoting it because as far as I'm concerned, this is the verse that gave me the revelation of God is a father for me.

You can listen to it and it may not come to you as a revelation. You know, Jesus told Simon Peter, Blessed are you for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you. In other words, but my father in heaven.

So what I learned from that instance where Peter said, you're the Christ. And Jesus said, it's not by your cleverness. It's not some human being who explains to you that I'm the Christ.

My father in heaven gave you a revelation. So I think that's also important here. There was a time in my life about more than 16 years after I was born again.

Well, theoretically, I knew God is a father. If you had asked me, is God your father, I would have said yes. I would have said yes for 16 years.

And yet one day it hit me like a revelation. You need to ask God for revelation. Paul prayed for the Ephesians.

I pray that you will have the spirit of revelation. Lord, give me revelation on this. Here's a truth I've understood in my head, but it doesn't seem to be a revelation to me.

That's why I'm inconsistent in my Christian life. So, John 17, 23, Jesus prayed, that the world may know, Father, that you have loved me, that you have loved them, these disciples, as you have loved me. Now,

for many years, I have preached that and told people, listen, the Father loves you as he loved Jesus.

But I've come to see, I have to be careful when I preach it. Because the wrong people take it. And the check is not in their name.

The check is not in their name. So, they can't cash it. They take it to the bank of heaven and say, sorry, it's signed by Jesus, but it's not in your name.

So, to whom did Jesus say, the Father loves you as he loved me? Turn earlier to John chapter 17 and verse 9. He's talking about those whom the Father had given to him. Verse 6, the men whom you gave me out of the world. He's only praying for them.

There's certain people whom the Father gave to Jesus. Out of the world. And for them, he prays.

Verse 9, I ask for them. I'm not asking for the rest of the people in the world. No.

See verse 9, I'm not praying for the world. There are a lot of people who tell you to pray for America and pray for India and pray for a city and walk around a city and claim it and all this Old Testament stuff. It's all old covenant stuff.

I say, Jesus said, I don't pray for the world. No. And I'll tell you, I don't pray for countries or cities or anything.

I follow Jesus' example. I never find any of the apostles praying for any other countries. This is all human ideas that have been propagated in Evangelical Christianity and most Christians are dumb and they just swallow it without checking whether it's in the Bible.

There's not a single example of anybody praying for a country in the Bible. You can do it if you want, but I'll tell you, nothing will happen. It's a waste of time.

I follow Jesus' example. I do not pray for the world. I pray for these whom thou has given me.

These are the people who forsook everything to be disciples. So I become more careful in telling people that the Father loves you as He loves Jesus. I have to say, honestly, it's not for everyone.

The Father does not love everyone as He loves Jesus. It's not true. But to the best of your knowledge, if you're a disciple, and you can go to Luke 14 and verse 26 to 33 to see the conditions of discipleship.

That is, you love Jesus more than everyone on earth. More than your parents, more than wife, children, husband, more than everything, more than your job, etc. You love Christ supremely.

Secondly, you're a person who takes up the cross every day. Luke 14, 27, and one who loves Jesus more than your possessions. Verse 33.

So this is the mark of a disciple. He loves Jesus more than everyone on earth. More than himself, more than his possessions.

He's a disciple. And then, Jesus, I'm praying for them. So I become more careful in saying, listen, if you fulfill those conditions, this is for you.

The check's in your name. But if you haven't fulfilled those conditions, I'm sorry to say the check is not in your name. There are other promises for you.

If you confess your sins, He'll forgive you. And there are many other promises for those who really don't want to pay the price of discipleship. Your sins can be forgiven.

But you can't experience this intense love of the Father. It's His love to be loved in exactly the same way as Jesus was loved. Boy, is there anything greater than that? To be surrounded by the love of the Father.

It's like these people who went to the moon in a spacesuit, and they don't breathe any of the moon's, there's no atmosphere there, but whatever is there on the moon, they wouldn't be exposed to that, to the surroundings of the moon. Because they were in an insulated spacesuit, which had the atmosphere of earth inside it. And that's how we're supposed to live as Christians here in this insulated suit, which has got the atmosphere of heaven inside.

I'm just rejoicing in being loved, just like Jesus was loved by my Father. And I'm living in a world where people know nothing about that, and they are not loved like Jesus was loved. God loves the whole world, yes.

But not as He loved Jesus. He says that is specially for disciples. And it's a wonderful thing to come into this.

I want to encourage all of you to really seek to be disciples, so this can be true in your life. And to the best of your knowledge, God doesn't put impossible demands before us. And the promises that Jesus gave, let me just show you one of them, in Matthew chapter 7. You all know them, they're not new to you.

Matthew 7, Jesus said, If you being evil, verse 11, Matthew 7, 11, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him? To whom was He speaking? Always ask, is the check in my name? Don't just grab the check and go to the bank of heaven, see if your name is there. Matthew 5, verse 3, sorry, verse 1, He sat down, His disciples came to Him, Matthew 5, 1, and He spoke to them. He spoke to these people who had decided to follow Jesus 100%.

And He said to them, Your Father will give you what is good, more than any earthly father will give food to their children. So it's a wonderful security that we find ourselves in. See a lot of our sins, if you go to the root of it, I found as observed Christians through many years in many countries, the root of a lot of their problems, a lot of their sins is insecurity.

The more insecure you are, the more inferior you feel to others, and then you lash out whenever you feel threatened, or somebody is trying to say something to you, you hit back. Why do you hit back? If you are in this space suit with the atmosphere of heaven, no matter what they say to you, it will just roll off, like water off a duck's back. It will not affect you.

If somebody insults you and says evil things to you, it will not affect you. It won't disturb your sleep, it won't disturb anything. I remember once, somebody was very upset with me over something, some decision I had to take with another believer, and he was very upset, and from another town, he called me up on the phone, and began to, not even knowing the whole facts of the case, it's always very often like that, they don't know the facts of the case, and they begin to find fault, and he kept on lambasting me and criticizing me, and I just kept quiet.

I could have put the phone down, but it was those other type of phones where you pick it up, and I kept it to my ear. I said, okay. And he spoke to me, I think about 15-20 minutes, just criticizing, criticizing, criticizing.

At the end, when he finished, I said, well, he was a believer, I said, brother, have you finished? He said, yes. I said, okay. I've got nothing to say.

God bless you. And I put the phone down. Six months later, he wrote to me and said, I'm sorry, brother Zak, I never knew all the facts of the case.

I misjudged you. I'm sorry, and I want to take back my words. What would I have gained by arguing with him on that phone? You know, it's a wonderful thing to live in this space suit, with the atmosphere of heaven inside.

You will not be disturbed. If somebody speaks straight to your face, and criticizes you, criticizes you, you say, well, okay, brother, sister, have you finished? I've got nothing to say. God bless you.

You cannot say that if you're breathing the atmosphere of earth. It's like you go up to the moon, and you breathe the atmosphere there, you'll die. But if you live in this atmosphere of heaven, my father loves me just like he loved Jesus.

And that's how Jesus was. When they called him Beelzebul, prince of devils, he was not disturbed. Our father who art in heaven.

I remember once when I was very young as a Christian, and I was wanting to, when I was still working in the Navy, and I wanted to go out and preach in the streets. Initially, I would preach far away where nobody knew me, because I was scared to stand outside the naval base where people knew me and would make fun of me that this naval officer standing here like some vegetable vendor shouting something. And I said, Lord, please fill me with the Holy Spirit and help me to be bold for Jesus, not to be ashamed of him.

And God gave me an assurance from his word that really strengthened me. In the Lord, when Pharaoh is in Genesis chapter 41, and Genesis 41, when Pharaoh appointed, you know, what I was scared of out in the streets if I preached was that somebody would shout at me or yell at me or call me a bad name and I'd feel very embarrassed. So, Genesis 41, when Pharaoh appointed Joseph as a ruler of Egypt, he told him, very good verse, verse 44, and I saw that as a picture of God running this universe telling me.

Genesis 41, verse 44, Pharaoh said to Joseph, though I am Pharaoh, without your permission, or I would say without my permission, that is Pharaoh's permission, no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. Now, it doesn't always come to everybody in the same way, but that day when I was seeking for help that came to me like this, the Father in heaven telling me, no one will ever be able to raise a hand or a foot against you, my son, without my permission. Can you imagine the security you get when you hear something like that from God? And I got the boldness to go out in the streets, and it didn't bother me anyway.

And the Lord said to me from there that nobody can even open their mouth and say something to curse you without my permission. It's a wonderful thing to realize this. You know, even David realized this.

We read in 2 Samuel when he was being chased out of Israel by his own son, and when he was being chased out from Jerusalem, he had to flee from Jerusalem, and there were people who hated him, and the

children of, I mean, people related to Saul came to curse him. And we read in 2 Samuel in chapter 16 and verse 5, there was a guy called Shimei who was a relative of Saul who threw stones at David. David was the king, but his son Absalom had pushed him out, his father, and sat on the throne, and David was out, and this relative of Saul was so delighted that David was kicked out, and Shimei threw stones at him and cursed him.

Verse 7, it said, Get out, get out, you worthless fellow. The Lord has returned to you the bloodshed of the house of Saul and has given the kingdom to your son Absalom. And Abishai was this general of soldier of David.

He said, Why should this guy curse my lord the king? Let me go and cut off his head and listen to this. Listen to these words and never forget it. The king said, What have I got to do with you, Abishai, sons of Zariah, if the Lord, verse 10, has told him, Curse David? Who am I to say, Why have you done that? Similar to the words we read in Genesis 41.

Without God's permission, that fellow cannot call me a bad name, cannot curse me. Our father who art in heaven. This is the basis of all prayer.

This is the basis on which we can live a consistent Christian life. If you're absolutely convinced, every single day, I told you that prayer is, give us this day our daily bread, means we have to pray that prayer every day, the spirit of it. I begin my day with our father, my father, who is in heaven.

No one can open his mouth or lift his hand or do anything against me today without your permission, because you're in heaven. And you love me intensely, I'm in this encased suit of your love, and I'm breathing that all the time. I'm not breathing the foul atmosphere of this world, and I'm not breathing the foul atmosphere of this guy who is cursing me or trying to harm me.

I'm in a space suit, breathing the atmosphere of heaven, the security I get by knowing my father in heaven. My brothers and sisters, you understood it. Ask God to give you revelation.

It will change your life once you get revelation. And I don't think you got revelation just by hearing me right now. But if you're earnest, some of you will see God on the basis of what you heard today and ask God for revelation.

It will change your life when revelation hits you. It took time for it to hit me, and you seek God earnestly. It's like on the day of Pentecost, they kept waiting.

They kept waiting and waiting, and one day the spirit came, and they were different after that. And that can happen to us. So, the other thing is the father loves us so much, and his goal is not just to show us his greatest mark of his love for me is that he wants me to become like Jesus Christ.

And he'll do everything to make me like Jesus. And you know how Jesus had to go through many trials, and he could take us through many trials too. And where I slip up, he will discipline me, which is a mark of his love for me.

We read in Hebrews in chapter 12, this amazing thing, verse 7, it is for discipline that you endure. God deals with you as with sons. So, our father in heaven, his love for us is not a soft, sentimental type of love, which says, how much money do you want, my son? I'll give you whatever you want.

You want healing? I'll give you healing. Whatever you want. He's not that soft, sentimental type of father.

He's a father who wants us to become like Jesus, and he knows that in order to become like Jesus, he may have to take us through trial. You know the great apostle Paul? In order to keep the great apostle Paul humble, the heavenly father gave him a sickness. Can you believe that? Will an earthly father give a sickness to a child? No, because the father doesn't love his child so much, as God loves us.

The father is only interested, my child must be healthy and strong. Which earthly father is interested that my child must become like Jesus, and if he's got to get a sickness to become like Jesus, let him get a sickness, Lord. Nobody prays like that.

But our father in heaven is like that. He loved Paul so much, that Paul says that in 2 Corinthians 12. The father saw that I would get puffed up with all the fantastic work he had done through me and all the revelations, so he gave me a sickness.

I prayed and prayed and prayed. Father, take it away. No, I won't take it away.

Thank God for that story in the Bible, which says that God's love for us is so great, that sometimes he will not take away a sickness, if that's going to keep us humble. Or will not take us a difficult person, you got to work within your office. You pray for years to get a transfer and you don't again.

That difficult person is going to be there. Or a neighbor, who's come to live with you, who's next to you and he's a problem. And you pray that he'll move away, and he's bought the house and he settled there forever.

That's how good God is. That's how good he is. He's determined to make you like Jesus.

He's not interested in giving you a comfortable life on earth. If that's what you're interested in, forget about Christianity. Go and do something else.

Do a business or something like that. But if you want to be a disciple of Jesus, he's going to really take you through the path that Jesus went. The path the apostles went.

But at the end of it, you'll become like Christ. Our Father who art in heaven, this is the first thing we need to be absolutely convinced about, is the palm with which we hold something. I've got a father in heaven.

In the Old Testament, the only name is God, God, God Almighty. Everything changed when the Holy Spirit came. We read in Romans in chapter 8. Romans chapter 8, verse 15.

You have not received the spirit of slavery to fear again. There's no fear. But you have the spirit of adoption.

That means God has made you his sons, and the Holy Spirit comes in and cries out, Abba. Abba means daddy. The correct translation of that Hebrew word Abba is daddy.

That's the intimate. Father is a very formal word. Daddy.

The Holy Spirit cries out. And that's an awareness that comes within us that I've got a dad in heaven who cares for me and his discipline is to make me more Christ-like. That's all.

If he smites me, it's like he's anointing me. See that verse in Psalm 141. I hope you know that.

Psalm 141, it says in verse 5, Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me. That's like anointing me with oil. It's like giving me the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

It's like anointing my head with oil. Don't let me ever refuse it. Smite me in kindness.

That's what the father does because you pray for anointing. You say, Lord, anoint me with the Holy Spirit. And according to Psalm 141, 5, he smites you.

It's an anointing. Have you seen it that way? We need to be assured. All our complaints.

Why is God treating me like this? And all this will disappear as soon as you know our father who art in heaven. Well, I could go on and on and on on that theme. But this is the fundamental thing that we must be assured of.

Ask God to give you a revelation. Amen.

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