

The Call of God - a Loving Father in Heaven

by Zac Poonen

Knowing God as a loving Father is essential for approaching prayer with faith and intimacy, and for experiencing the comfort and encouragement that He offers.

Duration: 1:23:17

Scripture: Genesis 3:15, Job 13:15, Psalm 23:1, Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 6:4, 1 Timothy 4:8, Hebrews 4:9

Topics: "Character Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of finding comfort and consolation in God during times of tribulation. He highlights the repetition of the words 'comfort' and 'consolation' in the Bible verses, emphasizing the role of God as the source of comfort. The speaker shares his personal experience of how his love for God has transformed his ministry, making it a joyful and effortless task. He also discusses the need for individuals to break free from the rut of religious traditions and external standards, and instead seek a deep and personal relationship with God.

Transcript

Praise the Lord. We have been thinking today about some of the distinctives of this wonderful New Covenant and what it means to live life under God's New Covenant. And we thought in our first session about the importance of allowing God, through the Holy Spirit, to lay the axe to the root of self in our life.

And then we saw what Jesus brought, grace, and what it really means. We saw that grace was equated with help in Hebrews 4.16. Grace to help in time of need. And we also saw in 2 Corinthians 12.9 that grace was equated with power.

My grace is sufficient for thee, for my power is made perfect in your weakness. What were the things that people like John the Baptist, Elijah, Elisha, Moses, did not know? They could not experience these things that I just mentioned, an axe being laid to the root of self in their life. They could not experience grace.

And this evening we want to think of what is one of my favourite subjects, that God is a Father, a loving Father. None of the Old Testament saints ever knew God is a Father, even the greatest of them. If you read the Old Testament, even though there are occasional passages, like the one in Isaiah 64, where it says in verse 8, O Lord, thou art our Father, that is so rare.

Isaiah is actually expressing a longing rather than a reality. That is such a rare thing. In those closing chapters of Isaiah, he is actually referring to that day when Jesus would come.

It says in Isaiah 61, how the Spirit of the Lord is upon him. So he is speaking in a sense of that future day prophetically, of the Lord as our Father. But otherwise there was nobody who ever dared to call God, Dad.

That is the real meaning of that Hebrew word, Abba. It is the most intimate word for Father in the Hebrew language, which we are told in Romans 8, that when the Spirit of God comes into us in the New Covenant, he cries out from within us, saying, Abba, Father, giving us the spirit of adoption, which we saw was the spirit of Sonship. And I don't believe that I will ever get weary of speaking about this truth, and I never do want to get weary, because I find that wherever I go, it is because people don't know what a good God our Heavenly Father is, that they have so many problems in their personal life, and so many problems in church life.

When Jesus was once praying, all by himself, and not all by himself, the disciples were with him. The disciples had grown up for thirty years or so in the synagogue, and they had heard the Pharisees pray many, many fantastic prayers to God in heaven. But when they saw Jesus praying, it says in Luke chapter 11 and verse 1, And it came to pass, that as Jesus was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray.

They heard him pray, and it was like something they had never heard in their whole life. They'd never heard anyone pray like that. It wasn't a formal prayer, obviously.

It wasn't just a prayer offered to impress people. Jesus prayed, I'm sure, like one who knew his father very intimately, and talked like one who could talk and listen. You know, like you, I mean the best illustration I could use is, if you were listening to someone speaking on a telephone, you don't hear what the other person is saying, but you hear this person speaking, and you know pretty soon whether he's speaking to the managing director of the company or to his own dad.

You can make that out by the way he's speaking. And they'd heard the Pharisees speaking, and it was like speaking to the managing director of the company. And when they heard Jesus praying, it was so different.

And they said, Lord, is this how we are supposed to talk to God? We have never heard anything like this. Teach us to pray. And it was an answer to that, that Jesus said, when you pray, from now on, when you pray, begin by saying, Our Father who art in heaven.

Because the most important thing in prayer is faith. If you don't have faith when you're praying, you might as well not pray at all. I've been to meetings where they pray all night.

I've been to fasting and prayer meetings. And I saw nothing much happen in those assemblies, in spite of those, in spite of those churches, in spite of all these long hours of prayer. People still fought with one another.

They couldn't get along with each other. There were quarrels in the homes, and they didn't have victory. All these long prayers didn't seem to accomplish much.

There was no faith there. It's like stirring something in a cup, and the cup is empty. You can keep on stirring.

There's nothing there. It's better to have a little bit, maybe milk and sugar and stir it. Something comes of it.

But a lot of prayers are like stirring an empty cup. I mean, they ease their conscience. Most prayer goes by the clock.

Okay, is the half an hour up, or is the one hour up? I remember years ago when I was a young Christian, and I was working in the Navy those days, way back, more than 40 years ago. And I wanted to pray all night, because Jesus prayed all night. And I found I was looking at the watch all the time, to wait till it became morning.

And I had accomplished the feat, finally. It was worthless. I might as well have slept and had a good night's sleep that night.

No, prayer is not a feat to be accomplished, that I endured a whole day of fasting and prayer. It was never meant to be like that. It wasn't like that for Jesus.

It was talking to his father. And he was closer to his father than to anyone else on earth. Everything else was secondary.

It was like two people were in love with each other, who want to walk off by themselves, don't want anyone to disturb them. And if they're really in love with each other, you see a young couple who are really in love with each other and planning to get married, they won't be always looking at the clock. If they're looking at the watch, you know, well, I doubt whether they really love one another.

And you know, prayer is like that. Jesus, for Jesus, it was like that. It was intimate communion with the father.

You don't have to tell two people who are in love with each other, why don't you go off by yourself and spend some time together? They're just always looking for that opportunity. That's how it was with Jesus. Nobody had to tell him, spend some time in prayer, spend some time in prayer.

I've read so many books on prayer, and heard so many exhortations on prayer. They never seem to, I mean, they stir me temporarily. And I'll tell you honestly, what most books on prayer that I read did to me, was make me feel guilty.

That's all. That I wasn't spending so much time in prayer. And that guilt would stir me to do something.

If you're honest, you probably have the same experience. I believe we could help each other a lot more if we were honest with each other. That's what I decided to be a long time ago.

And I found that it would stir me for a little while, because that power of guilt can stir you for a little while, but then it has a way of wearing out after some time. And then you don't do anything much, you revert back to the normal way of life, till you read another book on prayer, or you hear another sermon on prayer, and then you get guilty again. And it's these occasional stirrings of guilt that would drive me.

I realized there's something wrong there. That's not the way. It's talking to God as my Heavenly Dad, bringing to Him the little things and the big things in life.

Not always understanding why He does certain things in certain ways, not always understanding why He doesn't answer certain, why He says no to certain prayers. I used to say He doesn't answer certain prayers, it's not correct. I believe God always answers prayers.

Sometimes the answer is yes, sometimes the answer is no. See, if my little son came to me and asked me for something, I wouldn't keep quiet. No.

I would say yes or no. I would never keep quiet. And I believe, or it will be yes, no, or wait.

So, it wouldn't be silence. Yes, no, or wait. And it's like that with God when we pray too.

The answer is always there. It's yes, no, or wait. It's not time yet.

If my son asked me for a bicycle, wait, you're not old enough to ride one yet on the roads. Some others, the answer is no. Some other things, the answer is yes.

Sure, you can have that. God's exactly like that. And, you know, one of the by-products of knowing God as Father was, He delivered me completely from competition with other believers.

One of the great problems many of us face, I don't know, I'm sure many of you face it, I faced it very much as a young Christian, was feeling of inferiority. I felt I wasn't as good as other believers. I was an introvert, looking inward most of the time.

I was quiet. I was not an extrovert who would go out and slap people on the back and say hi. I was more reserved and shy and inward-looking.

And such people tend to be melancholic and frequently discouraged, depressed, and secretly envy others who are more outgoing and who can make friends more easily, or more attractive personalities. And I used to wish I could be like them. But I couldn't.

If I tried, it wouldn't last long. And then when I became a Christian and started to serve the Lord, I felt the same way. And the thing is, people who feel like that, when they're asked to do something, they're very conscious of what they're doing, and they want to do something in an impressive way, so that people will really appreciate.

Because such people long for somebody to appreciate them, and say, that was a good job. Because they feel so insecure. There are lots of believers like that.

Somebody says, that was a good job, you're a fine brother, and then they feel encouraged, and they keep going for some time. But you don't find many people like that who come to encourage you, and most people just discourage you, and a lot of messages in the meetings that we hear tend to make us feel guilty. That's how it was in most churches I went to.

A lot of churches that preach holiness, their main aim in the preaching is to make everybody feel nice and guilty at the end of the meeting, and feel they're not attained anywhere, and almost feel you'll never make it. Okay, you did a lot, but it's still not good enough. And I used to preach like that too, because I didn't know God as a Father.

But things changed, when I really came to see how good a Father God was. He's a God who encourages us, a God who lifts us up. You know, in the book of Hebrews in chapter 3, it says, exhort one another daily

while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 3.13. Exhort is a word which means many things, challenge, rebuke, correct. It's all involved in exhort, stir somebody up to do something. Some lazy fellow sitting there doing nothing, stir him up.

Exhort. But that word in the Greek language, Hebrews 3.13, is a word from which we get the word comforter, in John 14, paracletes, in the Greek. Jesus said, I will send you a comforter.

And I say, supposing this word were translated like that, comfort one another daily. It's really, that meaning is also inherent in that word. Encourage one another daily, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

I thought of it like this. Okay, here is a Greek word, which can mean exhort one another daily, or encourage and comfort one another daily. Here is a word which means either.

In fact, some other translations of this verse, and other translations translate it as encourage one another daily. But here it says exhort one another daily. Which translation, if you are a preacher, which translation do you like of that word, if the Greek word means both.

I'll tell you, that depends on your personality. It depends on whether you know God as a Father. Some would say, exhort.

That's the thing we need, brother. We need to exhort people. People are lazy, they are just sitting there doing nothing.

We got to stir them up, we got to challenge them. Because otherwise they'll get hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Yeah, there's a place for that.

But if you don't understand God as a Father, you won't be doing it properly. You will exhort people in a way that will condemn them. I know because I did it.

What about taking the other possible meaning of that Greek word, encourage one another daily, lest you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Is it only through exhortation, that we are going to save people from the deceitfulness of sin? Encouragement. You know, word of encouragement can do wonders.

And encouragement, even with little children. A word of encouragement to that child can very often do more than ten words of criticism. Please remember that with your children.

And I didn't do that with my children, when I knew God as one who only exhorted me. But when I saw God as a God who encouraged me, then I could do that to others. See this verse in 2 Corinthians 1. We know that the Apostle Paul went through a lot of pressures and trials, temptations.

He suffered a lot. And he says here in 2 Corinthians 1.3, Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, the God of all encouragement. You know God as the God of all encouragement.

I tell you, that's the only knowledge that can help you, when you go through trial. When you go through pressures, which he goes on to say here, that this God, and the word is the same, Paraklesis, the same word, comforter in John 14, the Holy Spirit. Notice the number of times this word comfort comes here.

I want you to just notice it. Comfort, consolation. What is the theme here? The subject is trouble.

First of all let me show you that. Verse 8. We would not brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life. Now, years ago, I, I don't know whether I have it here, I wrote a little, I read a little piece of poetry about this verse, where it speaks about being pressed out of measure and pressed to all length.

Pressed so intensely it seems beyond strength. Pressed in the body and pressed in the soul, and so on. And this type of pressure, pressed into knowing no helper but God.

That's the type of situation God allows us to go through sometimes. Pressed into knowing no helper but God. And in those type of situations, it says here, he was pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch, verse 8, that we despaired even of life.

Have you ever been in situations like that? Where the pressure of so many things, and you don't have to be an apostle, you just got to be a mother with a few sick children to face this. You don't have to be an apostle. Pressed out of measure, so many demands on you, so many things to do, not enough time in one day to do it, and it looks as if everything goes wrong on the same day.

Above strength, you say, Lord, can I ever bear this? Will I be able to endure till the end, insomuch, that we despaired even of life. I thank God for the honesty of the Apostle Paul. Some of us, if we despaired of life, we would not like to admit it, lest we be considered unspiritual.

Paul was humble enough to admit it, that there were certain times when he despaired even of life, and we had the sentencing of death in ourselves, and the whole purpose is, that we should not trust in ourselves. So that was the type of situation Paul is describing, and how did he get help in that? God of all comfort, verse 4, comforted us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted by God. Now I want you to notice the number of times that word comfort comes, in verse 3, verse 4, 1, 2, 3, 4 times in verse 4, consolation, verse 5, consolation, verse 6, consolation, verse 7, the last part, and consolation, the last part of verse 7, and verse 6. So many times, comfort, consolation, encouragement, comfort, consolation, encouragement, comfort, comfort, the God of all comfort.

It wasn't exhortation, it wasn't rebuke. When we are pressed out of measure, despairing of life, what we need is not exhortation, what we need is encouragement. And very often when such people come to a meeting, in a church preaching holiness, what they get is exhortation, not encouragement.

And they go away discouraged, when they should have received encouragement. And very often that's because the preacher doesn't know God as a loving Father, he only knows God as a holy God, who's got all these demands, must be like this, it must be like this, it must be like this, it must be like this, and why isn't it like this, and why isn't it like this. And I've heard a lot of holiness preachers, they just make people feel guilty when they, when they come to the meetings.

They don't know God, the God of all encouragement. That's the meaning, God of all comfort means the God of all encouragement. Everywhere you look, it's encouragement.

God's a loving Father. He's one who's there to help us. This demanding God, that's proclaimed in a lot of pulpits, is the result of a preacher being under the law, making you feel no matter what you do, that you're still not good enough.

Do you hear preachers like that? No matter what you do, it's not good enough. Think of you, if your son was doing something, maybe it's his homework, or trying to please you in some way, and maybe he's cleaning your car for you, and you go and inspect it, and you say, well that's not good enough, there's a little bit of dirt over there. And then he cleans that, and you find some other spot of dirt underneath, somewhere, and so it's still not good enough.

And you just tell that to him four or five times, and keep doing that for a few years, and just see what type of teenager you're going to have when he gets to that age. Well, those type of rebellious teenagers, who had parents who never encouraged them, always exhorted them, this, that, you're not good enough, this, this, this, this, is the type of people we have in a lot of churches. Difficult people who are trying to appear holy, trying to appear as though they have no problems, because they think everybody sitting around them has no problems.

People are riddled with problems. They're waiting for some word of encouragement, which they never get. I'll tell you what God told me once.

He said that I was like a surgeon, in the olden days, would find a patient with cancer, cut him open, expose the cancer, rebuke the parent, rebuke the patient for getting the cancer, and with his stomach wide open, wheel him out of the operating theatre. I said, that's what I was doing Sunday mornings, preaching, exposing the cancer, rebuking people for getting the cancer, cutting their stomach open, say, go home. And the Lord said, that was not what he wanted.

Does the cancer have to be exposed? Sure. Does the stomach have to be cut open? Sure. But it's got to be removed.

And the stomach's got to be stitched back together again. And the person's got to be given a painkiller, so that when he wakes up, he wakes up without a feeling of pain, because he's been given a painkiller, and he's on the way to healing. But it's very rare, very rarely, that you hear a message like that, that can expose sin in you, and yet send you home, with a lightness in your heart, a spring in your step, a song in your mouth, and a twinkle in your eye, because you know God has encouraged you, there's hope for you.

It all comes through knowing God as a Father. That's the God Jesus came to proclaim. And the Pharisees, who were the preachers in Jesus' time, had portrayed such a caricature of God as a strict policeman, waiting to catch you for something or the other, or like an officer of the IRS, doing an audit of your accounts.

A lot of people know God like that, and searching into, and what's this, and what's this entry, and what's this, where did this money come from, and where did you spend this. A lot of people know God like that, and no wonder their lives are so miserable. There's no joy in their faces.

The spirit of praise is not in their life. They don't know what it is, to rejoice in the Lord always. Yeah, I praise God for opening my eyes, to see that the one I have in heaven is not a policeman, not an IRS officer.

It's a Father who understands, who forgives, and who encourages, who tells me, even if I did it wrong, never mind, you can do it better. And who helps me. You know that verse in Romans chapter 7, I remember the day when God opened my eyes to see how in seeking victory over sin, like we considered earlier in Romans 6.14, that grace delivers us from sin's power, and we pursue holiness.

Very often, people who go through that stage of being justified in Romans 3, and seeking for victory in Romans 6, do not end up in a life in the Holy Spirit, as described in Romans 8. They usually, in their pursuit of holiness, the type of holiness described in Romans 6, where you present your members as instruments of righteousness, as it goes on to say in the last verses of Romans 6, they usually end up not getting married to Jesus Christ, but getting married to the law. And there's a lot of difference between the two. And here it says in Romans 7.4, Wherefore, my brethren, this is one step higher, you have become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that you should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

So I saw this as a marriage. I was formerly married to the old man, who was a wicked husband, who beat me up, and hammered me, and treated me badly, and I got sick and tired of that. I didn't know how to escape from this marriage.

Divorce, God hates. And here I am married to the old man for life, and mercifully, one day God kills the old man. That's Romans 6. Your old man was crucified with Christ.

And I'm free. Thank God. Now I want to marry someone who is upright, and honest, and who obeys God's laws.

And instead of marrying Christ, I marry the law. That's the experience of lots of Christians. The law is not like the old man.

The law is never hammers me, never troubles me, never asks me to do one wrong thing, but always asks me to do the right thing, but is so demanding. I must be up at 5.30 in the morning. It can't be late.

I must keep the house in order. I must have breakfast on the table by eight o'clock. And he doesn't lift one finger to help me.

And the house must be tidy, and the shoes must be in the proper place. The clothes must be ironed properly. Everything must be washed without a speck of dirt on them.

And it's everything like that. And I say, what did I, whom did I get married to? And the law will never die, like the old man. It's healthy, and strong, and will live forever.

And I'm doomed. When we talk about legalism, when we talk about people pursuing holiness, this is the experience of people pursuing holiness, if they're honest. They've got all these rules, which they live by, and it's such a strain.

When Jesus said, come to me, all you who labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. He was talking to such people, who were weary, and heavy laden, trying to keep these numerous laws in their pursuit of holiness. Trying to live by the standards of what their church taught them, mostly external standards, and rules, and regulations, and hoping that they kept it all right.

So demanding. And then Romans 7.4 says, when the law wouldn't die, God made another way. He still hates divorce.

He made another way to break that marriage, and that is, he made me die. The wife die. That was the end of that marriage.

Isn't that a wonderful way? God liberated me. It says, you are made dead to the law. Romans 7.4. You died.

Hallelujah. This wretched marriage into which I've gotten to, my first marriage is bad, my second one was bad, but I escaped out of both through the death of my first husband, and through me dying in the second one. And now I can be married, it says in verse 4, to him who was raised from the dead, to Jesus.

And his demands are just as strict as the law. But the difference is, he helps me. He says, okay, let's have breakfast at 8 o'clock, but let's do it together.

And he works with me. And if I'm the lazy type of person, who can have breakfast ready only by 12.30 in the afternoon, God says, Jesus says, never mind, let's work on it. We'll work on it.

You and I work on it. By next week, I get up to 11.30. In another month, I come up to 11 o'clock. The Lord never gives up.

He says, let's work on it, work on it. And maybe after four or five years, I get to 8 o'clock. I say, hallelujah.

And the Lord says to me, you made it. You made it. Now let's work on keeping the shoes in the proper place.

And let's work on some other area. Wouldn't you like to be married to such a husband? And he's helping you all the time. This is Christianity.

So many people are married to the law, and mistaking that for Christ. It's not. Have you seen in the Gospels, how Jesus was always there to help wherever people were in need.

If they didn't have wine at a wedding, and he was there, he was there to help them. If there were 5,000 people without food, he was there to help. And the disciples toiled all night and caught nothing.

He went right out there to help them. He was always there to help. And Mary and Martha were discouraged because their brother had died.

He went there and raised him up from the dead. I never find a situation where Jesus didn't help. He didn't just rebuke, you should have done it like this, and you shouldn't have done it like that.

He never went and told people, I told you to be like this. No, he came to help. A God who encourages us.

He revealed, and the Bible says that Jesus told people, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. See that's why I'm telling you what Jesus did. Because Jesus said to Philip, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father.

What you see in me is what your father is like. He's there to help you. I never see a single situation in the Gospels, where Jesus had to scratch his head and say, I don't know how to solve that problem.

Never. But some of us think that your problem is so big, that Jesus is forever scratching his head and say, boy, that's a tough one. I didn't know how to do that, solve that one.

You think, have you found out a problem like that? Where you can make Jesus scratch his head today and say, I don't know how to deal with that one. Is there anybody sitting here with a problem? You think the Lord doesn't have a solution for it? There's not a problem like that in the world. There's never been one

like that since the history of man.

When Adam sinned, it's wonderful for me to see. You see the loving father heart of God right there in the beginning. It says in Genesis chapter 1, that God made man on the sixth day, towards the latter part of the sixth day.

And then the very next thing was the seventh day, which was a day of rest, which shows the father heart of God, that God said to Adam, we're going to have one day together. You and I just walking, talking together, enjoying fellowship with each other. I don't want you to do any work this day.

And then you can go out and work for six days in the garden. What was God interested in with Adam? He wasn't interested in his work. He was interested in his fellowship.

I want to tell you, my dear brothers and sisters, God's not so much interested in all the things that you think he wants you to do for him. He's interested in fellowship with you. He wants you to talk to him.

He wants to talk to you. Under the law, it was different. Under the law, it was six days, you shall work and the seventh day you shall rest.

But for Adam, it was not like that. It was one day you shall walk with me and rest. Because the seventh day was the first day for Adam.

He was created on the sixth day. God had done all the work. And Adam entered into the benefit of all that God had done for him.

Do you know that's the meaning of the Sabbath? And I think our Seventh-day Adventist friends have missed it completely. Because they think it's a matter of the seventh day of the week. Like the Jews thought it was.

And Jesus came and said, that's not it. That was only a picture. And that was not the seventh day for Adam.

That was the first day for Adam. It was his very first day of life. It was the seventh day for God.

But it was the first day for Adam. And he didn't work for six days. He rested for one day.

Fellowship with the Father for one day and then he worked. And it makes a lot of difference if you've gone out to work for six days without having had any fellowship with the Father. And if you go out for six days after having had fellowship with the Father.

It makes a tremendous difference. And what the Lord is trying to say through that incident way back in Genesis chapter 1 and chapter 2 is this. That he wants us to have fellowship with him first.

And then go out, do whatever you want to do for him. Otherwise you're going to have problems all through your life. You have all that work laid out for you, dear mother, with all your children and everything.

And the Lord says, I want you to fellowship with me. It doesn't matter so many things you're not able to do. I want you to fellowship with me.

I want you to know my love for you. It's made a tremendous difference in my life. I found that I remember the old days when ministering for God was a strain.

It's not a strain now. Because to me, ministry is not the important thing. Fellowship with God is the important thing.

And I know that if I walk with God and talk with him, and I listen to him and I walk with him through the garden, like two people in love with each other, walking with each other, I know that he'll always tell me what I should tell other people. There's no strain there. Somebody asked me, Brother Zach, how long do you take to prepare a message? I said, well, about 35 years.

It's not a question of sitting down one Saturday and getting books and tapes and listening to all of them and writing it down. It's walking with God, listening to him, and saying, Dad, what do you want me to tell people? Sure, if you tell me something to tell them, I'll tell them. If you have nothing to tell them, I'll sit down.

My ministry is not my God. A lot of people, their ministry is their God. They're in competition with other ministries, because their ministry is their God.

They have to show we're doing something. They have to show other people, I'm doing something. When I started serving the Lord, when I came out of my job and started devoting my whole time to the ministry 34 years ago, I said, Lord, I'm never going to send a report of my work to anyone.

Why should people know what I do for you? So much of misunderstanding. Now, I'm not against people reporting. It's a question of motive.

A lot of reports of Christian work are, it's obvious from the very tone of those letters that it's asking for money, or it's showing off what a fantastic ministry our particular organization is doing for God. So since I don't have a desire for either, what am I going to write a report about? For what? God takes care of our needs, and it's enough that God knows. There's tremendous security when we're walking with God as a Father.

We're not in competition with anyone. We're not here to show that I'm doing a greater work for God than that other person out there. To me, that's as stupid as the right hand saying, I'm doing a greater work for this body than the left hand.

Can you imagine anything as stupid as that? The right hand boasting, do you know that I sign all the checks? The left hand has never signed one, and if the left hand ever signs a check, the bank won't accept that signature. The right hand never boasts like that. All the important jobs are done by my right hand.

He doesn't boast like that, and neither does the left hand feel jealous of the right hand at all. It's because they're all connected to the head. And when we know God is a Father, we're not in competition with anyone.

We say, Lord, you decided what I should do. I just want to go out and do it. God told Adam, you've got to be a gardener.

He said, fine, I'll be a gardener. And if God's told me to fulfill a certain job in the body of Christ, I just go out and do that. And if God's told you to fulfill a certain job, aren't you happy with that? Why do you want to compete with somebody else? Why do you want to look at what God is doing through somebody else? Rejoice in it.

That's another part of the body. Makes a tremendous difference if you know God's your dad. And you're a mother, perhaps, struggling with children, and you envy that apostle who can travel here and there and do so many things for the Lord.

You think you're doing nothing for God? Do you know that Timothy became an apostle because he had a mother who had faith? You know who made Timothy an apostle? His mother. And for all you know, that little baby in your lap, God may want him to grow up to be an apostle, but he'll never be an apostle unless you as a mother do your job now. And I believe that when Timothy goes up to heaven and gets his reward, God's going to make sure his mother comes along with him and gets her reward too.

He'd never have been that apostle if his mother hadn't done her job. You know, we can be content when we know God is a father. Lord, that's what you made me.

You didn't make me a... You can say that, mothers. You didn't make me a man. You made me a mother.

And maybe God's given you some children who are not too well, and they demand a lot of your time. Do you have a complaint? Or will you take up this challenge to demonstrate by the cheerfulness of your behavior and your conduct that God didn't make a mistake? It's a wonderful testimony. The world is full of people who can't explain God.

They say, why does God allow all those poor people to suffer? Why does he allow so many innocent people to get sicknesses? Well, I'll tell you, I don't know the answers to all those questions. But it doesn't change my conviction that God is a loving father. There may be a million things I don't know the answer to.

But it doesn't alter my conviction that God's a loving father. And even if many, many things happen in my life which I can't explain, I'd say, that doesn't change the fact God's a loving father. That's the thing we must be rooted and grounded in.

That's the thing that you see, you don't have to be worried. You don't have to be worried where your food is coming from, where your clothing coming from. Think of the birds of the air.

They don't store in barns. They have no bank accounts. They have nothing.

But I don't think any bird ever died of starvation. I don't think so. Occasionally birds drop dead.

Perhaps they're sick. But I don't think there's ever been in all these thousands of years, a bird that died because it didn't get enough to eat. Yeah, that's how God is.

Cares for the birds. And Jesus said, look at the flowers. Who clothed them with such wonderful dresses? God.

And he gave them wonderful, beautiful colors. They weren't all black and white. All the flowers in the world are not black and white.

Some people think God should have made all the flowers in the world black and white. Because that's their idea of God. Everything is black or white.

We must be very simple. God apparently doesn't hold your view. He has a slightly different view from many of us.

His idea of holiness is not the same as yours. He's put them in many, many colors. Multicolored.

Things you would be embarrassed to wear. God says, I'm not embarrassed to put those clothes on those flowers. We need to be liberated.

We are bound too much to the opinions of men. Jesus said, concerning clothing, look at the flowers, how God clothes them. I want to say the same to you.

Look at the flowers and see how God clothes them. Look at them, meditate on them. Whatever you do, do it because you want to please your father, not because you want to please men.

There's so much of bondage because we are trying to please men. Because we are not satisfied with God as a father. See, there's a lot of difference between the work of God and the work of man.

If God plants 25 trees down a road, they may be from the same type of seed, same type of tree. But when the trees grow up, they're all different. You notice that? Even if it's the same type of tree, the same seed, when these 25 trees grow up by the wayside, they're all different heights, different number of branches, different number of leaves.

They're not standard height. God's not a God of uniformity. God's not running the military where everybody dresses up the same and puts their toes on the line.

No. But what's the thing that unites those trees? Life. Same life in all those trees.

But if a man, you get a construction man to build 25 apartments down that road, they'll all look alike. Sometimes down to the last nut and bolt. That's how man's work is.

Uniformity. Same type of door, same type of nut and screw and bolt and same type of window. And you can make 2,500 apartments like that.

That's man's work, but it'll be impossible to make two trees that are alike, not even in your garden. God's work is not uniformity. He's not interested in it.

We like to make uniformity. We like everybody in the church to look just like little tin soldiers all looking like a military parade. God isn't.

He's a father. How did your children come? To the same quality of seed and egg and yet they're all different. Different height, different temperament, different personality, and yet it's from the same father and mother.

Variety, but unity, not uniformity. It's people who don't know God as a father who want uniformity, who want military style rather than God's way. Diversity, different.

And when people don't know God as a father, they want to do it like that in their churches too. Uniformity. Every church must be exactly alike.

Not only must they be dressed alike, their pattern must be alike, they must do everything alike. There's depth there. It's like apartment blocks.

It looks nice when it's painted and all that, but there's no life in any apartment block. There's life in those trees, which are all different. Is it God's work or man's work that's going on in so many Christian groups

today? I'm not here to criticize or judge.

I'm only an observer. But I want to point out what I observe. The difference between trees and apartments.

There is a difference. One's got life and the other's got no life. In one there's uniformity, in the other there's unity.

And we'll never be able to get people to be one, if we go in for uniformity. You know, if many of today's holiness people were in God's place, I think they'd have made all five fingers the same size. Because that looks neat.

You know exactly, maybe five thumbs, ten thumbs. I really believe a lot of people who preach holiness would have, if they were in God's place making Adam, they'd have made Adam with ten thumbs. Because that looks neat.

This looks so ugly. One's long, one's short, one's this side, and this is different here. You know what God says? My ways are not your ways.

My thoughts are not your thoughts. As the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways from your ways. Now the sad thing is that we are so stuck in the rut, that it's difficult for us, even Almighty God to change us.

That's the sad thing. It's like a car that's got into the rut on a rainy day in a slushy road. And no matter how much the preacher revs up the engine, it just rotates and rotates and gets more into the rut than it was before.

That's what happens to a lot of people. They say, we're not getting out of this. Our fathers were in this rut and our forefathers were in this rut, and we will be in this rut till the Lord comes.

Is there freedom there? Lot of sound, lot of wastage of gas. Keep filling up the tank, but you keep moving in the same place forever, while other people are cruising down the road. It all comes through knowing what God is like as a father.

He's interested in variety in his children. He's interested in holiness, but not our understanding of holiness. He's interested in encouraging us, in making sure that we have life, that we work together, that we love one another.

Not that we're all alike. He's not raising a military army, a spiritual army, yes, but not in these externals. And this is so important for us to remember.

Way back in the beginning, I told you, God gave Adam a day of rest. And then when Adam went into the garden, I see another aspect of God's love, in the fact that He gave him freedom. He said, Adam, I want you to make your choice freely.

I don't want to catch you by the neck and say, come on, obey me. I could have made you like a robot, Adam. I could have made you like these planets, Adam.

Look up at these planets. Look at Jupiter. Look at Saturn.

See how they rotate? They obey me perfectly. Look at the stars. Look at the sun, the moon.

They never disobey, even for a fraction of a second. You know that we can keep our watches by the sunrise and the position of the stars. God could have said to Adam, you know, I could have made you like that, that you'd obey me without a choice.

The sun doesn't have a choice in obeying God. I hope you know that. The planets and the stars, they have no choice.

They just obey. But Adam had choice. That's the mark of God's love.

Adam, you're not a robot. You're not a star. You're not a planet.

I want you to be my son. Eve, I want you to be my daughter. And you can never be my son, if I don't give you freedom.

I want you to be free, even though that freedom means the risk that you might break my heart by disobeying me. I'm willing to take that risk. And when, if you do it, I'll do something to set it right.

And that's exactly what he did. But God, who could look into the future and who could see that Adam and Eve were going to disobey him, was willing to take that risk and gave them freedom. He didn't send even one angel with them.

Do you know that if all that God wanted was to prevent Adam and Eve from going and eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, all he had to do was to send one angel with them. That's all. They'd never have gone.

Even if they were drawn to that, they'd have acted holy and walked this side because they wanted to impress the angel. Like we act holy when we are in the believers. One believer is enough to keep us from many sins.

You know that? One believer living in our home will bring a lot of peace into our tumultuous home. And one angel with Adam could have prevented him from ever eating of that tree. God didn't do that because if that was like that, Adam could never have become a son.

He had to make a choice out of freedom. And so God sent Adam into the garden of Eden with freedom and not with difficult commandments. What a lie the devil has propagated throughout the world.

Saying God is a hard God. He's such a demanding God. He's so hard and austere.

Lie. Absolute lie. And I'm determined by my life and by my, with all my life and with my words to proclaim the devil's a liar.

He's a liar. He's been a liar from the beginning. The apostle John at the age of 95, 65 years after the day of Pentecost writes in 1 John chapter 5 in verse 4 or verse 3. He says his commandments are not a burden, are not burdensome.

And he didn't say that after obeying God for one day or one week. He said that after obeying God for 65 years. Imagine a man who's obeyed God for 65 years, being persecuted because of that, living alone in an isle of Patmos, persecuted for the faith and says it's worth it.

The commandments of God are not a burden. What was he saying? He was saying the devil's a liar. No command of God is a burden.

His yoke is easy. His burden is light. But some of us Christians don't give that testimony.

Our long serious faces give people the impression the commands of God are a burden. So heavy. Oh brother, I'm trying to be holy.

Like I heard of that Christian with his long coffee pot type of face, trying to witness to someone. You want to be a Christian? That man said, no, thank you. I've got enough problems already.

No, that's not a good testimony. The commands of God are not a burden. His yoke is easy.

His burden is light. He's a good God. He makes everything work together for my good.

He cares for me. He knows the problems I have with difficult children, unconverted children, sick children, financial difficulties. He knows it all.

And he's a loving father. And if I die, I will die trusting him. Like Job said, though he slay me, I will trust in him.

Who is this man saying it? Was it a man who just had one difficult child? Was it a man who had little financial difficulty? No, he's a man who lost all his 10 children in one day, who lost all his business in one day. His finances had crashed. And the only reason the devil didn't take away his wife as well was so that he could keep her to nag him.

God gave the devil permission to kill his wife too, but he didn't kill his wife. Said she's better off alive than dead. Kept on nagging him.

And on top of that, he had all these sores in his body. I've never heard of a man in all my life who suffered so much, who lost all his 10 children in one day. Some of us think we've got a lot of suffering.

Just listen to Job. He lost his 10 children in one day, all his money and all his business in one day. And his wife was left alone there to nag him day and night.

And on top of that, he had these three preachers to come and nag him too, as if a wife was not enough. And then he had these sores from head to foot. And at the end of it all, he says, though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

That's faith. He lived way back there in the Old Testament. But I think he knew something of God's goodness.

Do we know it? Do other people see that in our life? Or do other people see in us people with rules and regulations? You know, I think that many Christians who got all these truths are, to me, truth is like the bones in our body. Do we need truth? Certainly. I've got out of a lot of Christian denominations only because of doctrine.

I say, you're not preaching the truth. You're not preaching the whole counsel of God. The Apostle Paul said to the Ephesian elders, I preach to you the whole counsel of God.

But truth is like bones. And if you were only bones, you're not going to attract people. You know that? Supposing you're walking down a dark road one night and you see a skeleton coming to you.

Do you count his bones to make sure that all are there, all the doctrines are there? Oh, no, I feel like turning the other way and going the other way. It's no use saying, hey, hang on, let me tell you, I've got all my doctrines right. Here are bone number one, bone number two, bone number three, all the way.

He has no time. He's gone by the time you explain your doctrines. And that's how sinners run away from this holiness church, which has got all its doctrines right.

And which is proclaiming bone number one and bone number two. And that skeleton standing in the pulpit, trying to attract people to Christ. Won't work.

Neither am I for these other type of Christians who've got no bones, who are just flesh. I wouldn't be able to stand here if I didn't have any bones, just flesh, like jellyfish or even jellyfish, whatever type it is, fit into any opening. You know, jellyfish have got certain advantages.

You make an opening like a diamond, it can fit through. You make an opening like a square, it can fit through. You can circle or square, anything can fit in through anything.

I've got some disadvantages. I can't fit in through some of these doctrinal openings. I get stuck and I say, sorry, I can't come through that.

But jellyfish have no problem. God didn't make us like either of these. He made us with grace and truth.

Truth covered over with grace. Bones covered with flesh. That's what makes people attractive.

That's what made your face so attractive. And that's what makes Christianity attractive. To present God correctly.

The Bible says that no one had seen God at any time till Jesus came to earth. And once Jesus came to earth, people could understand what God was like. Oh, this is what God is like.

One who puts his arms around a leper and the leper thought, boy, I thought God was like these Pharisees who'd yell at me to get out of the city. Don't come anywhere near me. These people were carrying the Bible and go to the meetings.

The leper says, I thought God was like that till Jesus came along and put his arms around me and thought, and I realized that God isn't like that. This is what God is really like. Thank God Jesus came.

What do other people think of God after they've seen you and me? That's where we need to repent. Have we given people an impression that God is a God full of rules and regulations? Like the policemen and the rules and regulations of the tax department. It's so complicated, we can't even understand.

God is not like that. We see another thing way back there, when the devil came to Eve, his aim was to tell her, somehow or the other, that God didn't love her. And that was what he was implying when he said, why has God forbidden you from eating of this tree? Can't you see how attractive it is? How it can make you wise? How it can give you a knowledge of good and evil? I mean, doing evil is bad, but what's wrong in knowing good and evil? And that sounded reasonable to Eve.

And the devil said, you know why God hasn't allowed you to eat of that tree? Because when you eat it, you'll be like him. And he doesn't want you to be like him. He wants to keep that position for himself.

And like a fool, he went and believed that lie of the devil. Does the devil tell you things like that? Why hasn't God answered that prayer? Why hasn't God healed that sickness in your family? Why hasn't God done that? He could have easily done that. He didn't do it.

Why? He doesn't love you. He's too busy. He's got other things to do.

He doesn't care for you. And if only the devil can get, succeed in getting you to believe that, that's enough. He's won, just like he won with Eve.

And even when Eve made a mess of her life and Adam made a mess of his life, God comes into the garden. And you see the father heart of God there too. When God asks Adam, did you eat of this? And Adam says, no, it was my wife.

And God asks Eve, did you do this? She says, no, it was the serpent. And instead of pinning the blame on them and say, Adam, don't try to get out of it. You did that.

Instead of pinning the blame on Eve and say, don't try to get out of that. You gave that to your husband. He doesn't say a word.

He directs his wrath against the serpent and says, the seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head. It's as though he was telling Adam, I know you made a mess here, but I've come here to clean it up. I'm going to send my son one day through one of your seed and the head of that serpent will be crushed.

You see the loving father heart of God, that a son of his has messed up something, direct disobedience, maybe like some of you. God told you to do something very clearly. You didn't do it.

So many times in your younger days, you heard the word of God clearly. You never listened to him. You had the scriptures, you had the church, you have preachers, but you never listened to them.

You went and made a mess of your life, just like Adam and Eve made a mess in the garden of Eden. And when God comes, he doesn't rebuke you. He says, okay, let's clean up this mess.

Now I'll do that. The seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head. This is God right from the first page of the Bible till the very end.

But this is not unfortunately, the God that's presented in many churches. Lots of people live as orphans, insecure, full of fear, when they should be full of joy, when they should be walking out rejoicing. God is a God of love.

What is holiness? Is it something you've got to be afraid of? Another sermon on holiness? Are you afraid of the word holiness? Are you afraid of the word health? What do you want to speak on? Health. Please don't speak on health. What should we talk on? Sickness, becoming more sick.

How many sicknesses would you permit in your child? Not one. Don't let the devil fool you that he allows you to sin. God allows you to sin.

Some people have told me that even. Oh, brother, God allows me to sin once in a while because he's got to keep me humble. It's like if your child's got 10 diseases and you take him to the doctor and say, well, doctor, don't heal all of them.

Keep one or two so that he remains humble. I mean, let him have a little tuberculosis or something. Otherwise, he may get puffed up.

We don't want him completely healthy. He's got eight or nine diseases, but just heal about seven of them. Have you heard of anything more crazy than that? You know how the devils fool so many people? You've got to have a few sins to be humble.

You've got to have a few sicknesses. It's not true. As much as you hate every single speck of disease in your child, God hates every single sin in your life and mine because you see how sickness is destroying your child's body.

And God sees better than you and I do. How sin is destroying your soul and mine. That's why he hates it.

And as much as you work on your child and give him bitter medicines and take him through difficult surgery and take him through a lot of pain and give him bitter medicines and injections and the child wonders, why is mummy doing all this to me? What's your goal? That your child should be perfectly healthy. And what's God's goal in all the things he's taking you and me through? Trials and difficulties. God's allowed some Christian group to take me to court in India because I exposed their wrong doctrine.

Why? To sanctify me. He took Jesus, the religious people took Jesus to court. So they can take me to court too? Sure.

It's for my good. I'm not going to go hanging my head and say, Oh God, why did you allow me to be taken to court by these people? How am I going to spend all this money on attorneys and all that? No. Who's in control of this universe? God or the devil? I say God.

There's nothing that can happen without his permission. Nobody on earth can lift a finger or move his leg or do anything without God's permission. He makes all things to work together for good to those who love God.

He's a loving father. He never allows a single thing to happen to his children, which is not for their sanctification. There may be injections, there may be surgery, there may be bitter medicines, but it's all that I might be perfectly holy, perfectly healthy.

That's it. That's God's will. He's a loving father.

And our calling is to demonstrate that to an unbelieving godless world around us, so that we can draw them to know him as father. And when we know him as father, then our lives come to rest. You know, the Bible says in Hebrews chapter 4, that there is a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

Hebrews 4 and verse 9, there remaineth therefore a rest. In the margin here it says, a keeping of a Sabbath for the people of God. And that rest comes through knowing God as father.

My life comes to rest. In the midst of a troubled world, I can walk in rest. There are pressures, there are fears, but we don't act on those fears.

We are tempted to be discouraged and depressed. But we stand up. I know times when I'm tempted to be discouraged and depressed and don't feel like praying.

I stand up and I say, well Lord, I can't understand why all these things are happening and I don't seem to have much freedom to pray. But I can still praise you. Whatever may be happening around me, God, you're still on the throne.

Whatever may be happening around me, the devil was still defeated two thousand years ago. Those facts don't change. Whatever may be happening around me, my sins are all still forgiven.

The blood of Jesus has still got power today. Those are unchangeable facts. Jesus is still coming to establish his kingdom on the earth.

And he's still got all authority in heaven and earth. And it's still true that all things work together for good to those who love God. I want to praise you for those things.

Even though there are a thousand and one things around me, I can't explain. I praise God that these things are still true. And I will praise you for these things.

And the depression goes. God is a loving father. I want to encourage you, my brothers and sisters, to trust him.

Trust him. He will never let you down. He will never fail you nor forsake you.

One of my most favorite verses, which I turn to when I'm in pressure and trouble, don't think I don't have any of that, is this verse. In Isaiah 49.23, the last part, it says, They shall not be ashamed that wait for me. Please remember that.

God may not work according to your timetable, but he will work. He may not work when you think he should work, but he will work. Do you know that he took 4000 years to send Jesus to earth? Long time.

But in the fullness of time, he came. He won't take as long to solve your problem. Don't worry.

He'll do it sooner than that. But he has his own timetable. I've discovered one thing in prayer that I can tell God, I can ask God what he should, to tell him what he should do for me, what I want him to do for me.

But I can't tell him how to do it. And I can't tell him when to do it. Those things I must leave with him.

I must say, Lord, this is what I want. Lord says, Okay, heard. Now don't tell me how to do it.

Don't tell me when to do it. I got your request. Yeah, remind him again of it tomorrow.

But don't tell him how or when. He's got enough wisdom to know how and when, which is the best time. There is a fullness of time.

There is a time and a season for everything. It says in Ecclesiastes 3. There certainly is. They shall not be ashamed to wait for me.

And in that waiting process, where I'm waiting, not understanding why all these things are happening, but trusting. Lord, I don't know. But I know you're a loving father.

And the devil will never get me to believe a lie that you don't care for me. You care for me. It looks as if you're absolutely silent.

But you're there. I believe that. You care.

I trust you. I believe I will never be ashamed. Now I want to tell you my testimony after 41 years of being a believer.

He's never let me down. I've never had to be ashamed till today. And I believe it will be so.

Till he comes again or till I go to be with him, whichever comes earlier. Those who wait for him will never, never be ashamed. God is a loving father.

One last thing I want to say and that is, when you know God like this, the God who gives us freedom, you'll give other people freedom to be themselves instead of forcing them to be like you. You have too many husbands forcing their wives to be like them. You have too many preachers forcing other people, molding them to be uniform to their own ideas.

I want to say to you, that type of holiness which is perfected in the fear of man is a counterfeit holiness. True holiness is perfected in the fear of God. It says in 2nd Corinthians 7.1, true holiness is perfected in the fear of God, not in the fear of men.

It's not by my threatening to throw somebody out of the church and thereby forcing him to conform that I make him holy. That's not holiness, that's counterfeit. I say, brother, I give you freedom to be different from me.

I mean, if you're causing other people to sin, I'll have to speak to you about it. If you come with an immodest dress or something and cause other people to sin, I'll have to speak to you about that. But otherwise, I give you freedom.

You don't have to do everything exactly like I do it. No, you don't have to have my views on every little thing. If you're born again and God's accepted you, I accept you.

Give people freedom and you'll have a holier church and you'll have less robots in your church. You'll have genuine people who are free and you'll have less dead works and more living works. Are we scared to give people freedom? Probably because you don't know God as a Father yet.

But you can begin today. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Will you say what the disciples said to Jesus? Lord, teach me to pray.

Teach me how to talk to God. And you'll hear Jesus saying to you today, when you pray, say, Daddy, say, Our Father, who art in heaven. Begin like that, so that you have a foundation for your faith.

So that you can be liberated from the rules and regulations which have tied you down for so many years into true freedom. Don't be scared. You're not going to be less holy.

You're going to be more holy, with genuine holiness. There'll be more holiness in your family. There'll be more joy in your family, when there's more liberty.

Not the false liberty that the world talks about, but the true liberty to walk in freedom in a way that pleases God. Heavenly Father, help us. Help us to honor you, to know you better.

We seek your glory. We pray for many here, Lord, who are insecure, who've got sorrows, trials and pressures, and doubts and fears and insecurities, because they're too ashamed to admit to anyone. We thank you, Lord, that your love is not narrow like the hearts of men.

Your laws are not heavy. Your yoke is easy. Help us to know you, and to know the liberty that comes in our life, through knowing you as a loving Father, who's always on our side against the devil.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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