

Today is Father's Day, a day in which we honor dear old dad and give him a funny card or tie that he would never be seen in public with. A new father, very excited about the birth of his first child and wanting to follow all the rules asked the nurse: "What time should we wake the little fellow in the morning?" Boy was he in for a surprise!

I found this in the *Reader's Digest*: My father was completely lost in the kitchen and never ate unless someone prepared the meal for him. When Mom got sick, however, he volunteered to go to the supermarket for her. She gave him a detailed list of the seven items needed, carefully numbered 1 through 7. Dad returned later very proud of himself and proceeded to unpack the grocery bags. He had one potato, 2 carrots, 3 boxes of detergent, 4 dozen eggs, 5 hams, 6 bags of sugar and 7 bags of flour.

Four men were sitting in the waiting room. A nurse came in and went up to the first man and said: "Congratulations, you have twins." "Great," replied the man, "my favorite baseball team is the Minnesota Twins." She went to the next man and told him that he had triplets. "That's amazing," said the man, "I work for 3M!" Then she went to the third man and told him that he had quadruplets. "Wow," said the man, "I work at the Four Seasons Resort." The fourth man was groaning and banging his head against the wall. The others asked him what's wrong and he replied: "I work for 7 UP!"

But seriously, Father's Day is a time to remember and pay respect to those who share in the parenting role. However, this morning, I would like for us to think about and honor the Father of us all, our Heavenly Father. Our scripture text is taken from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, the eighth chapter, verses 12 through 17.

Read Romans 8:12-17

A little boy whose father was away from home a lot on business trips, looked at his dad's picture on the wall and said to his mother: "Mom, I wish Dad would come out of that frame." Is God real to you, a Person near at hand? Or is He more like a picture on the wall, a motto, a doctrine, or something wonderful to look at and think about, but still in a frame?

If you want to know how well a person understands Christianity, then ask them what they think about being a child of God and having God as their Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls your worship and prayers and your whole outlook on life, then maybe you need to re-examine your relationship with the Lord. For everything that Jesus taught, and everything that is distinctively Christian is summed up in the knowledge of the fatherhood of God the Father.

So this morning let's look at the different aspects of the fatherhood of God. First, just like many of us have had the opportunity to have a personal relationship with our earthly fathers so we have the wonderful opportunity to have a personal relationship with God. In the Old Testament, God's relationship with the nation of Israel was mainly through His prophets and kings; individual personal relationships were limited to a very few special people. Then Jesus came and showed us that God desires a personal relationship with each one of us. The barrier between God and us was removed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Matthew 27:51 tells us that when Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom, opening the way to God for all who will believe in Him.

God's fatherhood also implies that God has authority over us like an earthly father has over his children. In the home in which Jesus grew up, the father was a symbol of authority. By "Father" Jesus did not mean the kind of indulgent father often found in American families today. The Jewish father loved his children, but he expected unquestioned obedience and honor that continued throughout his life. In Jesus' mind, the word *Father* constituted obedience rather than mere indulgence.

Now my sons were not perfect when they were growing up; they were boys and were sent to "time out" more times than I can count. And the apple did not fall far from the tree, while we love our grandchildren dearly; they get their share of "time outs." As parents we must discipline our children so that they will grow up knowing right from wrong. As Proverbs 22:6 states: "Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it." The *Message* paraphrases it this way: "Point your kids in the right direction and when they're old they won't be lost."

Even though my sons may have misbehaved, disobeyed, and made me pull my hair out at times, I love them and have always forgiven them. Now think how we must make God shake His head in disbelief and think about pulling His hair out because of the way we act and disobey Him. But God loves us and forgives us beyond our imagination. Forgiveness is part of fatherhood as illustrated in the Parable of the Prodigal Son in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke. The father not only forgave his wayward son, but ran to meet him with open arms, forgetting all that he had said and done, and welcoming him back into the family. Our Heavenly Father does the same for us when we come back home to Him.

A man shared that his 14 month-old son, who had just learned to say "Daddy," had been struggling with asthma and an ear infection for two weeks. He coughed and sneezed continually, and his nose ran like a faucet. Each night when the man came home from work, the little boy would run to meet him at the door, smiling, coughing, nose running, yelling "Daddy, Daddy!" The man noted that he was not offended by his runny nose or close-range sneezes. He loved his son deeply and enjoyed his love for him as his father. He said that it

reminded him that though we are sick with sin, God loves each one of us dearly and desires that run to Him like a child crying “Abba, Father.”

When Jesus’ disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, He gave them and us the Lord’s Prayer. He told us that we are to begin with “Our Father.” The Aramaic word Jesus used for Father was “Abba” which is a tender term of a child’s endearment or “Dear Father,” “Dear Daddy,” or “Papa.” Never before had God been addressed like this in the Old Testament, yet not only did Jesus do it constantly in His prayers, but He also taught His disciples and us to address God in the same intimate, trusting manner. We do not pray to some impersonal “Force” of Star Wars fame, but to our Heavenly Father.

Since God is our Father, He naturally concerns Himself with our basic needs. Jesus taught us that our food, clothing, and shelter are concerns of God. In Matthew 6:32, Jesus said: “Your Heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things.” Jesus continued in Matthew 7:11 by adding: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?” As our Father, God knows and loves each one of us. Saint Augustine said it best: “God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love.”

Because He loves us and because God is our Father, He also disciplines us as His children. God is our Father, not our favorite uncle. Many of us have had an uncle who would let us do anything. Mine was Uncle LeVerne, a Yankee from New Hampshire, who would give my brothers and me banana splits before supper. A favorite uncle will indulge a child’s desire because he does not have to accept full responsibility. As earthly parents, we know that to love means to desire the best for our children and to exercise the necessary discipline to encourage them. Hebrews 12:6 tells us that the Lord disciplines those He loves, in order to correct our faults; to help us grow up to be the children that He wants us to be.

In our text for this morning, Paul is using a metaphor to describe our new relationship with God. He speaks of the Christian being adopted into the family of God. At the time of this writing, adoption was a serious and complicated process in the Roman Empire. Under this process, the adopted person lost all rights to his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family. In the most binding way, he got a new father. Thus the person became an heir to his new father’s estate. If other sons were born, it did not affect his rights; he would be co-heirs with them. Under the law, the old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out; all debts were cancelled. He was regarded as a new person entering into a new life with no record of the past.

Paul is implying here that in the past we thought we had control over our sinful human nature, but God, in His mercy, has brought us under His complete control. The old life no longer has

any rights over us; God has every right. The past is cancelled and its debts are wiped clean; we begin a new life with God and become joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, God's own Son. As adopted children we enjoy all the privileges. Christians are adopted children by grace; Jesus, however, is God's Son by divine nature. Everything belongs to Jesus, but by God's grace we share with Him. We don't deserve this, but God, our Heavenly Father, in His amazing love and mercy has taken us all in – the lost, helpless, debt-laden sinner - and adopted us into His own family, so that the debts are cancelled and the glory inherited.

As parents and grandparents, we often share our past experiences with our children so that they will not make the same mistakes that we did. In the same way, our Heavenly Father would like to save us from future mistakes if only we would only take time to ask Him, listen and follow His will. God knows what the future hold; as the song goes: "He's got the whole world in His hands."

The passengers on a train were nervous as they sped through the dark stormy night. The lightning was flashing, black clouds were rolling, and the train was traveling extremely fast. The fear and tension showed on the faces of the passengers. However, one little boy sitting by himself and playing with his toys seemed unaware of the storm or the speed of the train. One of the passengers asked him: "Son, aren't you afraid to travel alone on such a stormy night?" The little boy looked up with a smile and replied: "No, ma-am, I'm not afraid. My father's the engineer!" When the storms of life come suddenly upon us, let us remember that our Heavenly Father is the engineer and He will get us safely through whatever we are facing.

Dr. Kenneth Chafin, a professor of evangelism at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth tells about the time his five-year-old daughter Nancy asked him if he was going to be home that night. Dr. Chafin replied: "No, I'm sorry, but I have to go to a PTA meeting tonight and speak on what "An Ideal Father Is." Then he got an idea. He asked: "Nancy, what makes a good daddy?"

Little Nancy began to list the qualities that she thought would make a good father. She said: "A good father knows how to build a kite." Chafin recalled the day they had flown a kite together in the park. She said: "A good daddy knows how to build a fire." They had done that the night before. "A good daddy knows how to catch fish," she said. Earlier in the week, they had gone fishing and caught a small fish. Chafin put the list in his pocket and left for the PTA meeting.

During the preliminaries that night, he took the list out and glanced over it. Suddenly it dawned on him, the qualities that Nancy had listed for a good father did not require him to buy anything for her, but every one required that he give himself to Nancy; that he be there for her. That is exactly what God has done for us. He has given Himself to us in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. He is our Heavenly Father and we are His

children. Let us remember and honor our Heavenly Father not only today, but each and every day. Amen