

“... Father, hallowed be Thy name...” (Luke 11:2).

Talking to Our Father

by J. Wayne Kilpatrick

“AND He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come”’ (Luke 11:2). “God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). “One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6).

What is prayer? It is more than just religious sounding words, or repetitious verbiage. Prayer is the praising, requesting, and thanksgiving of a child to His father. Prayer is easy when you understand that we are just talking to our Father.

To many, God is either unreal or simply does not exist. They view Him as a fictitious character. One little boy described Him as “a very old man who lives way off in heaven.”

To others, God is a disappointment. One Christian quit the church because she said God did not answer her prayers. Many accuse God when some disaster or tragedy strikes.

Some want God’s blessings, but they do not want God. It is a little like having a rich uncle. We may not want the rich uncle around, but we want what he has. A vast difference exists in wanting God as a person, and wanting God as a provider, protector, and a problem-solver!

Some just want Him in an emergency! But a God of last resort is no God. Such is mere magic.

God becomes a genie in the bottle or a bellhop who answers our ring.

To many, God would be in the same category as the police department or the fire department. You would only call Him when in distress.

Let me describe God in this acrostic:

J—Just
E—Eternal
H—Heaven
O—Omnipotent
V—Victory for the saints
A—All-knowing
H—Humble

G—Grace
O—Omnipresent
D—Doom for all sinners

How many of us think of Him first as *our Father*?!

I. THE BENEFITS OF A FATHER AND CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Think of visiting an ice cream parlor. You order a double dip of butter pecan. The counter girl dips it up and brings it over to you. Just before handing it to you, she takes a great big lick and says, “Ummmm, that is terrific.” What would your reaction be? You would be shocked, appalled, surprised, and offended. You might call the manager and make an issue of it.

One week later you go back to that same ice cream store. You decide to get a double dip of butter pecan, and your daughter wants a Coke. You sit down in the booth while your daughter goes to get the Coke and the ice cream. Soon she comes back, plops down in the booth with the ice cream and Coke, takes a great big lick of your cone, hands it to you, and says, "Ummmm, that butter pecan is terrific." What would your reaction be? You would probably say, "Glad you like it, Sweetie," and think nothing of it.

Why the difference? Did you suspect the counter girl had a cold or the flu? Did you suspect she did not brush her teeth or use scented mouthwash? No, she had a beautiful, sparkling smile, just like your daughter's. Why were you so disturbed by her licking your cone, while you had no adverse reaction at all when your daughter did the same thing? The difference was that your daughter had a relationship with you that was special. She had certain privileges that non-family members did not enjoy.

Suppose your son comes to you and tells you that his birthday is coming up in five days. At the dinner table, he announces that he hopes you have not forgotten his birthday and that he would like a new pair of jeans and a basketball for his birthday. You would probably reflect on the ragged condition of the jeans he was wearing and think of the fun you and your son could have shooting baskets together. You would be favorable toward the request.

But suppose that after dinner the neighbor's son knocked at the door, and when you opened it, he announced that his birthday was coming up in a few days, and he was hoping you would buy him a new pair of jeans and a basketball. You would probably be shocked at his audacity, especially when you consider that his parents could easily afford to buy them for him.

Why the difference in your reaction? Was it because you hated the boy? No, he was nice enough. Had he done something wrong, like breaking your window or letting the air out of your tires? No, he was generally considerate of others. The only difference in him and your son was in his relationship to you. Your son had a right to talk to you about jeans and a basketball because he was your son. It is as with the child of God. He has certain rights and privileges that those who have never es-

tablished a Father-child relationship with the Lord do not possess.

The New Testament presents God as the Father of all the people in the world in the sense that He created them and provides the sun and rain for their crops and flowers. But the Bible does not say that *all* people are the children of God. We become God's children when we respond to His gift of love in Jesus Christ. How do we become children of God? Paul says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus; For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:26, 27). God wants us to know that we possess this "new birth" here and now:

And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:11-13).

II. THE ASSURANCES OF THE FATHER AND CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Children have the assurance of salvation. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). I have seen very little growth among Christians, very little enjoyment of the Christian life, very little usefulness in the kingdom of God, until a person comes to this crucial assurance. The person who is plagued with doubts and fears lives in an unhealthy spiritual climate which inhibits growth, joy, and fruitfulness.

God has also given His children the assurance of victory. Paul said, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able; but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). We do not have to live in defeat, surrendering to the corruptions of ourselves and the world, the attacks of Satan, or the allurements of the world. Spiritual victory over evil is the birthright of the healthy child of God.

God gives us the assurance of forgiveness. As children of God, we often fail to live up to His

expectations of us. We often sin and violate His will. But God has made provisions for such failure and has promised to forgive, cleanse, and restore us to fellowship with Himself when we admit our failures. John said, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Peter said, "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you" (Acts 8:22).

God has given us the assurance of guidance. As we walk with the Lord, God will guide us in making the right decisions and walking in the right paths. Psalms 23:3 says, "He guides me in the paths of righteousness." Psalms 48:14 says, "For such is God, our God forever and ever; He will guide us until death."

God has given us the assurance of answered prayer. Jesus said, "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full" (John 16:24). One of the most exciting truths about the Christian life is the sure knowledge that when we pray God is listening. Nothing is more certain than the promise that the Lord hears and answers prayers. Our Father is delighted when His sons and daughters come to Him with their petitions. He is grieved when His children distrust Him; He is hurt when His children are cold toward Him, afraid of Him, or treat Him like a stranger.

III. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FATHER AND CHILD RELATIONSHIP

We must love our enemies. Jesus said,

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you; in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:43-48).

Granted this is not easy. It is easy to love those who love us, but hard to love those who hate us. But what a message loving our enemies sends to the world!

We have the responsibility of becoming mature Christians. Peter said, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:14-16). We must not pattern our conduct after our old life but mold our character after the likeness of the Father in heaven. Paul said, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Ephesians 5:1). Just as children learn to read, walk, and eat by imitating their parents, you and I learn holiness by imitating our Father in heaven. We are to shine in the world. Paul said,

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world (Philippians 2:14, 15).

We shine by cheerfully obeying the Word of God (without murmuring) and by getting along with our fellow man (without disputing). Galatians 4:6 gives the secret of a shining lifestyle: "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" The indwelling of the Holy Spirit gives us the power to live the Christian life.

CONCLUSION

Hebrews 12:6, 7 teaches that God disciplines His children: "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" The discipline of God proves His fatherly love for His children. My father chastened me the day I broke out windows in his old schoolhouse. Several others were involved in the incident. My father did not discipline them, because they were not his children. God's discipline in our lives proves that we are His children.

The apostle Paul says that because we have been received into the family of God "we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" (Romans 8:15). It is natural for a baby to cry. God expects His children to pray. He delights to hear their cry, and He blesses them when they cry out to Him. Chris-

tian, because you are a child of God, accepted in the family, cry—cry to Him! Pour out your heart. Your Father will hear and answer your prayer. Prayer is just a child talking to his Father!

QUOTATIONS

“The person who cannot wonder . . . is but

a pair of spectacles behind which there is no eye.”

Thomas Carlyle

“The person who prays only when he feels like it doesn’t pray very much.”

Archbishop Whelton

“I will be so busy today, I must take two hours for prayer instead of one.”

Martin Luther

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