

“God the Father, Part 3: Ministry”

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I'm going to answer one question from last week, and then we are going to jump into this week. We've got lots to get through, finishing up our third week of God the Father, talking about the Father's ministry to us. Let's go ahead and pray. We'll start our time together.

Gracious Heavenly Father, we are so grateful. An opportunity like this where we would come into your house, Father, and we would spend almost an hour of time just thinking about your goodness, thinking about your character, Lord, thinking about your attributes, thinking about your ministry to us, your people. We pray that you help us to think well in this space today, Lord God, to think right thoughts about who you are, Father, and that this would be more than an academic exercise, but an act of worship, Lord. Prepare our hearts to see you as you truly are, that we would be increasingly like you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Great. Hey, so first things first, if you weren't here last week, we had a great discussion. Brian Neal, first of all, did a fantastic job of leading us through the mission of the Father. One of the things that came up as he used this phrase, he talked about our relationship with God not being a transactional relationship, right? And someone had rightly pointed out, now, wait a minute here, there's a little bit of transaction that goes on, right? And so one of the things we wanted to clarify is, yes, indeed, there is a difference between a transaction and a transactional relationship. And I think some of us understand the difference, but just to be clear about it, right? There is a great transaction that happens between us in the Christian life and between God, right? We, he gets our sin, we get his righteousness, right? That is a transaction, right? And we understand that language even in the business world or wherever it might be, there are transactions that happen. When you switch to having a transactional relationship, what you're saying is that transaction is all there is. That's all there is, right? And so we don't have a transactional relationship with God, meaning that it's nothing more than just us getting his righteousness and like, there's not just a business deal that's being done, right? Like that is, that is a key component of it. It is ushering in a different kind of relationship for us. And so just wanted to talk about the difference between that, like the great transaction versus having a transactional relationship, okay? If that doesn't make sense you can come see me afterwards.

We'll do a bit of review this morning. Again, we had a few weeks off because of snow, a week off because of, of our great presidents today. And so we're going to, Brian did a great job of sort of catching us up, but I want to go back to a few weeks ago where we started this entire endeavor talking about the fact that God calls himself father, right? And that of all the metaphors of the world, all the metaphors, he chose father and then gave us father so that we might understand something of the divine versus us and our human relationships, our inability. He gives us marriage. He gives us all sorts of familial metaphors. And as we live them out in the real world, it's intended to enhance our understanding of who he is, right?

So in both of our great creeds, the Nicene, the Apostles Creed, two of the oldest creeds that we have, that's exactly how they begin. The Apostles Creed around the first or second century says, I believe in God, the Father Almighty. And same with the Nicene Creed, we believe in one God, the Father Almighty.

When Jesus comes during the incarnation, every single time he prays to God, every time he prays our Father, never once did you use any other term. And he teaches us as well, right? When he gathers the disciples and they say, how do we pray? He says, you start like this, our Father.

And so Michael Reeves says in his books, *that is who God has revealed himself to be, not first and foremost creator or ruler, but Father. Before he ever created, before he ever ruled the world, before anything else, this God was a Father loving his Son.*

Why would he highlight that? Why would he contrast those two things? What's the difference between us first and foremost? Not that God isn't creator, not that God isn't ruler, but what is so essential for us to understand about the difference between primarily what God is versus his actions? What's so important about understanding the difference between those two things? Why is it important that we understand God first and foremost as Father rather than creator or ruler?

All right, it's relational, right? Show something of his character, right? God is complete in and of himself. He's in relationship with the Son, with the Spirit. What else?

Okay, the love, right? We already said that God is love. God is a giving out, an outgoing God, right? So it tells us something of his character, his attributes. What else?

Not dependent on us, right? If God is first and foremost a creator, who is God before creation? He becomes dependent, right? If God is first and foremost a ruler, then it's the people that he rules that gives him his identity of who he is, right?

And so Michael Reeves says, no, no, we're talking about eternity past. Before he ever created, before he ever created a people for himself to rule, God is a Father eternally to an eternal Son. That is who he is.

And that's important for us, right? Because I think for many of us, myself included, right, before I read this book, that's certainly what I would have said, like, explain who God the Father is. I wouldn't have said, well, you just said it. He's a Father. He's a Father to a Son. I would say, oh yeah, he's the creator. He's the initiator, right? He's the one we pray to. He's all these things that are from our human standpoint, in time and history. It's how he relates to us. But God was God before he ever made us, before he ever made creation. And so God in the beginning does create, right?

That's our first point here, this being versus action.

What problems arise, as we said, from this metaphor? So when we're thinking about God as Father, that's a beautiful concept for some of us. I know many of your stories here. What are some of the problems that arise for us? Worshipping a God who calls himself Father. Any idea?

My father beat me, right? Good. What else? What are some other problems?

Abandonment. Good.

Conditional, right? Absolutely. Many of us experience conditional love from our Father.

All the attributes that God displays for us throughout the Scriptures, many of us, we talk about this all the time, but Tim Keller used to have a great line. He would say, the world is on video and God is on audio. These are truths that are out there. We understand in concept, in theory, who God is, what the gospel is, but the reality is, is we live in the real world. And it's very difficult for us in all aspects of our Christian life to understand something like forgiveness, grace, unconditional love when we have never experienced that in the real world, right? That almost all of our relationships are, as we said last week, transactional. You know? What can you do for me? And so it's very difficult for us.

Don Miller, he wrote *Blue Like Jazz*. He has a book about his own relationship with his father. And I love this quote. He said, *my father left home when I was young. So when I was introduced to the concept of God, the Father, I imagined him as a stiff, oily man who wanted to move into our house and share a bed with my mother. I can only remember this as a frightful and threatening idea. Today, I wonder why it is that God refers to himself as Father at all. This to me, in light of the earthly representation of the role, seems a marketing mistake. Why would God want to call himself a Father when so many fathers abandon their children?*

That's the earthly perspective. It's difficult. I remember for me, most of you know my story. I don't really know who my dad is. I haven't talked to him for 12 years. It was very difficult for me. And I think that this is important concept too. It might take a while. It might take a while for you to really be able to call on God as your father at a heart level. And I think for me, when I first became a Christian, I really attached to the idea of God as King. I needed a protector. That image of God, that metaphor for God, was incredibly helpful to me to know that Jesus called himself my friend, my brother. Those are things that I had concepts within the real world. Father took

me a lot longer to get to. But when I did, I can say that it absolutely transformed my relationship with him. Because it really is, regardless of whether you have a good relationship or a bad relationship with your father, we were created in the image of God and our hearts long for a father. They absolutely long for a father.

And when you discover, as Michael Reeve said here, he says, *God the Father is not called Father because he copies earthly fathers. He is not some pumped up version of your dad. To transfer the failings of earthly fathers to him is quite simply a misstep. Instead, things are the other way around. It is that all human fathers are supposed to reflect him. Only where some do that well, others do a better job of reflecting the devil.*

Why do you think it's important? For your own spiritual life, why do you think this is more than just a concept? Why would all of the creeds begin with we talk about God the Father? Why would Jesus himself only refer to the Father? When he told us to pray, he said, call out to the Father in all of the language throughout all of the scriptures that God uses for himself to talk about his children, his family, his bride. Why? Why is that so important for us? How do you think that changes or is supposed to change somebody's spiritual experience of God to really grab a hold of that metaphor that God has given us and to be able to call him Father? Not just with our mouths, but from our heart. How do you think that changes you? And maybe you've experienced that in your own life. Maybe you're still wrestling with it. If you can think back to sort of coming into grips with who this Father is, how does that change us? How do you think it's supposed to change us?

Yes, Lolly. You know, you've heard the phrase that we all have a God-shaped vacuum. And knowing him as that Father makes you whole, it completes you. And if you don't have that, you spend your whole life trying to find that Daddy figure, but knowing him in that position as the perfect Father fills that hole in the longing. Yeah, that's beautiful. That's great.

Yeah, and I'm not going to go through all of them here, but we know that that fathers do play almost an outsized role in the life of their children, right? You can look at statistics, crime rates, addiction, suicide, mental illness in terms of the relationship that a child had to their father or failed to have to their father. Not that moms aren't important. They play or I got another set of stats for that too. But fathers really do. And I think it does hint at something when we look at it from our earthly perspective that exactly as you said, Lolly, like we were made to be children of the living God. We were made to have a Father, right? And that every single Father, as Michael Reeve says, this is the gold standard, right? And many of us had fathers who didn't live up to that standard. And man, that'll wreck a heart up. It just absolutely will wreck a heart up. And that's why God continues to use that language to draw us back to himself to say, come on, come on home, right? We'll talk about it at the end even. But when Jesus says you want to know what my dad is like, here's the story of the prodigal son. And it's why it's one of the most important parables that he ever spoke because there's something in it is so earthly, so human for us. The deepest longing of our hearts is to have a Father that loves us.

So how do we get there?

How do we get there? I think part of it is, as you see in your notes here, talking about the very, very beginning. Let's talk about the very, very beginning, God's intentions for creation. Like we've talked about this a little bit in part, but we're going to go into a deep dive today, right?

God the Father versus God the Father of lies.

So in the Garden of Eden, God creates Adam and Eve. And one of the things that Michael Reeves draws out in his book, *Delighting in the Trinity*, is that so often we think of the fall of humankind merely in terms of obedience or disobedience. To use that word again, transactional, right? That they were told not to do something and they did it. And because of that, they fell into sin. And he said, yeah, that's part of it. Absolutely that's part of it. But with all of the relational language that God has given us to understand himself, there's something much deeper that's going on there. And again, we've been talking about it from the very beginning, our God is a relational God, right? That God did not set the world into motion and begin redemptive history with the idea that he would create a whole bunch of people for himself that would just obey his rules, right? That he would stand at a distance and that he would be like some sort of Greek mythic God who would just be like throwing down lightning bolts to anybody who disobeyed him. And all he wanted was blind obedience. That's not at all why he created him. In fact, he says at the very beginning that the Trinity, right? Us, make them in our image. And then all of the scriptures point back to God's ultimate design for humanity is that we would be caught up into the divine love of the Trinity. That's what Jesus talked about, is that they would know you the same exact way that I know you, that God was creating a people for himself to love, creating a community of people for himself to expand the great love that was just sort of bursting forth from the Trinity. And so we've got to think about what happens in that garden as far more than just disobedience, right? It is relational rebellion.

And so you take notes about this, but when we think about how the book of Genesis is even written, right? It is a contract. It is a covenant. It uses covenant language. You guys are familiar with that term by now, that from the very, very beginning that God was working with a people to say exactly this, that in olden times, right, I'd go back as far as you want, certainly by the time the Bible was written, there was what was called suzerain and vassal relationships, okay? Suzerain is just a fancy word for king. Vassal is just a fancy word for little kings, right? So if, if Hobie was the king of Habersham, which he kind of is, let's be honest, right? He kind of is, right? And he wants to appoint me to be the little king over just Clarkesville, right? Like our relationship would be such that he obviously would be the one who was in control. He was in charge of everything. And yet he would deputize me to say, you are now going to go into Clarkesville and you are going to be my representative. You're going to be my representative. And that's exactly the way that the book of Genesis is written in this kind of contractual covenantal language that God of the universe has now sent his vassals, his little kings, those made in his image and then he tells them, be fruitful, multiply, right? Like all of those things, here's your job, be stewards of the earth, represent me, right? And fill my glory, right? Fill the earth with my glory. That's, that is your job.

And so when, when Satan comes who is called the father of lies, he brings them an alternate story, and it's not just a matter of eat the fruit, don't eat the fruit, right? What's happening there is a call to a different kind of loyalty, right? He says like, your dad is a horrible father. He's a horrible father, and he's promised all these good things to you, but he's a liar. He doesn't have your best intentions. In fact, what he's afraid of is that you're going to actually usurp him and take his place. And what he's asking for in so many words, he said, bow down and worship me instead. Let me be your father. And that's really what happens then in that.

So yes, it starts through the, the disobedience, right? They, they reject the father, but the Bible tells us it's so much deeper than that. It's so much deeper than that, which is why when we talk about the generations to come, every single person being born with sin, it makes sense. You think about it even in a sense of, of generation to generation to generation to generation. If our parents way, way back there in the garden chose to be children of a different father than all of us by default are born with the wrong father, right? That's our great, great, great grandfather back there, the father of lies, right? And so the whole story of redemption takes on a different flavor then, that from the very beginning God is trying to redeem all things. He is trying to bring his children back home. He's trying to set things to right, which is why he sends his only son to be our representative, our older brother, right? To show us the way back home to the father, to pay the penalty for our rebellion, to pay the penalty for, for our, not just our, our disobedience in our wills and in our minds, but in our very hearts that we love the wrong things that we have bowed down and we have worshiped the wrong father and he's calling us back home to himself. And so everyone is born with faithfulness to the wrong father, enemies of God, right?

Michael Reeves says, those who are made to enjoy the beauty of the Lord turned away to enjoy their own. Love's longings and the desires of their hearts shifted from the Lord to themselves and thus instead of running to him, they would now hide from him, hide from him.

So that's a lot of, a lot of information. That's probably a different paradigm for understanding creation, fall, thoughts, questions?

In the Suzerain-vassal relationship, yeah, the vassals render a tribute of some sort to the Suzerain. How, where does that fall in our relationship?

Yeah, so I think this is exactly right. Like it's, it's even more drastic than what it would be for a normal vassal because the whole idea is that now what we are offering is our very selves. You have been bought at a price, right? Your whole life now is one of surrender. That's it. You become a tool in the hands of the Creator, right? Like you, you are a, a cracked vessel now in everything with your life now, constantly, like just as Jesus did. He said, I can't say anything that the Father hasn't told me to say. My whole life is one of surrender. So it's, it's even more than just like, well, here's a 10th of the taxes that I got this month, right? It is everything. It's a full surrender. And which is why he says like, we are no longer slaves because the Father of lies, he's extracting a good bit too, right? He's extracting a good bit too. And that is one of slavery. And he says, no, no, no, no. Yeah, you're, you're going to surrender everything, but you're going to do it as my son, right?

And even as we say that, we realize, right, that we've already gotten everything. Like all, all we're returning back to him is, is all that we already have, which is from him, right? Like he purchased our life. He gives us, he gives us grace, freedom, forgiveness, eternal life. And so what else do we have to give him, except to give back the glory that he already deserves? And he says, that, that's what you're going to give me. You're going to fill this earth with the glory of the Lord. But it is, it's going to demand everything. It's not just a little portion. I think some of us would like it if it was, like just tell me, just tell me how much of my life I have to give you, right? If I can hold on to this one, this one, this one, and this one, I'll just give you this part, right? Right? Yeah, that's good. Good question.

Other thoughts about this framework, other thoughts about this idea, about how we think about the fall and about creation relationally? Yeah, you can keep chewing on it. That's okay. I mean, this is, you know, we had talked at the very first week, when we started like, this book, *Delighting in the Trinity*, and why it was so transformational for me, this is a huge part of it. I mean, reframing the entire story of Scripture in a way that, that brings it down to earth in some ways with this familial language and understanding the great scope of it, like, again, more than a transaction that I throughout my life, maybe through your life, I had prayed the prayer a thousand times and I just thought this is my fire insurance, right? Like, I'm going to, I'm going to get the card, I'm going to get out of jail free and thank you very much, Lord, right?

But if you read the Scriptures that way, like, most of the New Testament just doesn't make any sense. It just doesn't because there's this ongoing call to be conformed to the image of Christ. And so with that model, then let's turn to these other passages in the New Testament that sort of help round this out a little bit so you know this isn't just Michael Reeve's idea or Steve Woodworth's having forbid. But when Jesus comes, the high priestly prayer, John 17, praying before his disciples, before his crucifixion, and he prays to God and he said, *Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know, meaning the disciples, that you have sent me. I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and that I myself may be in them.* And it goes on, you can read the rest of John chapter 17, but some pretty unbelievable claims of Jesus there, right? That you have sent me, that they might understand who you are, that I might show you as you really are, right? That all of humanity from the very beginning has bowed down to the wrong king, to the wrong father, and they didn't understand who you were, and so I came with all the fullness of God the Father, right, on display, and they got to see you face to face, they got to touch you, they got to hear you, right? And in that, I am inviting them to know you, to love you, to experience you, to have the same kind of relationship with you as I have, and as I have always had, that that was the end goal, right?

We call that union with Christ, we'll talk, we're going to talk three whole weeks on God the Son, and we'll get into this a whole lot more. It's a huge part of our theology that we overlook quite a bit, but if this is the goal that we would be united to Jesus Christ and His death, His resurrection in such a way that we really do get wrapped back up into the Trinity and get to experience what Christ has experienced with the Father from eternity past.

I mean, and that's what we said at the very beginning, we said, listen, your conversion is a means to an end, it's the beginning, it's the very beginning, right? So many of us just stop at that place and we say, okay, I prayed the prayer, right? I got out of jail free, and Jesus saying, great, now you are freed up, now you are freed up to go home, to be fully reconciled to the Father, to experience all the rest of the Christian life that God has in store for you. And so many of us, as we walk around and we say like, man, I've been a Christian for this many years, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, I've just, you know, I've never got to the abundant life thing, I just haven't, right? And I say, well, yeah, because you stopped at a summer camp like 30 years ago with one prayer, right? And you thought that was the whole story, you thought that was it, right? And Jesus saying, no, no, that's just the beginning, I freed you from the penalty of death and sin so that you can be unified with me and come experience what I've experienced from the Father from eternity past.

Reeve says the Father sent his Son to make himself known, meaning that not that he wanted simply to download some information about himself, but that the love of the Father eternally had for the Son might be in those who believe in him and that we might enjoy the Son as the Father always has.

Now I know that has got to be a little bit different than anything that you've ever heard before. It certainly was to me, but all of you come to CPC so maybe this is old hat, I don't know, I just came from a different church. Thoughts about that, about that vision, about what God is actually inviting us into, about the purpose of Christ coming and what is available to us in the relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit. Thoughts about that, questions? Yes, Carol.

I know a lot of times when we talk to other people about Jesus and we're introducing them to Jesus and becoming a Christian, telling them the thing about, okay, you're giving your whole life over to God and he's good. It probably still sounds to them a lot like, yeah, I'm giving my whole life over to this God that's going to expect me to do this, that, you know, it can sound like still I'm just exchanging one slavery for another. But, and I don't want to mislead people and it doesn't ever, I don't think it exactly comes out and says this, but like you observe Jesus and he went to a wedding and he's enjoying it, I mean, in my mind. I see him, you know turning water into wine, he's enjoying it and I know, you know, not everybody likes exercise, but everybody has some different things in their life that they just enjoy doing just to do them, it doesn't accomplish something per se, but you know, and I'm getting older and of course, I don't really run now, I just kind of, you know, walk a little faster, but I just feel in that I feel close to God. But how is that right? I mean, is that good theology to say I know God and those things that I feel his enjoyment? It doesn't exactly come out and say that, but I feel like...

Well, I think it does. I mean, I think do all for the glory of God, right? That like he takes great pleasure in our faithfulness to him and all things that we're doing, right? Like he is, I mean, there's not a single time I don't ride my bike where I'm consciously thinking, Lord, thank you for breath in my lungs and legs that are able to do this, right? It doesn't have to be this way. There's lots of people who can't do this, right? Like, I'm going to do this, I'm going to, I say at the beginning of every single bike ride, Jesus, come ride with me.

It's like the corniest thing in the world, but I say it and I say it out loud because I use those as times as saying, like, if there's anything right now that you want to talk to me about, there's anything that you got to work on in my life, like you got me in the next two hours, just have at it. It's beautiful, right? It's beautiful. Now, I think, and then there's different ways, like we could, we could run and we could exercise because we worship our bodies as the temple and in a negative way, right? Like we are the temple in not a spiritual sense, but that, like we want to be known, we want to be seen, we're infatuated with our looks, our bodies, our, you know, competitive, whatever it is, there's, I mean, every single thing that we engage in could be used for good or for bad, right? All the time, all the time. And I think it's like, it's a little bit of a fine line for us, right? Where something is tipped over to the place of being an idol to us now. And now it's actually competing for God, right? And I think that that is, that's part of it. But you're right, like we sometimes focus our attention on all the things you can't do now that you're a Christian. And it is true, like the scriptures themselves say, you are no longer a slave to sin, but you are a slave to righteousness, right? It uses that same language. So you're right, like, sounds like I'm saving one slavery for another. Yeah. But man, the master over here on this side, like, delights in you has nothing but good for you, right? And so there is, there should be a freedom on our part to enjoy the good things that God has given us. But St. Augustine talked about our disordered loves, disordered loves. And it's when we take something that should not be ultimate and make it ultimate, right? So we keep things in their place, right? Is this a good thing? Absolutely. It's a good thing. Like kids are, kids are a great gift. But I think all of us have struggled at one time or another if you've had children with making those the ultimate thing, right? They are, they are the thing that defines who I am, not God any longer. Instead of just seeing him as a gift, they become kind of a curse, right? And like you are only as happy as your most miserable child at all times. We get there, right?

So I think anything, anything that takes away from God's stamp of who we are, the truth of what he says, and we trade that and said for earthly things that give us the purpose and meaning that only God can give, you know? But I do think, like, live it up, enjoy it. I mean, that would be a cry of the Reformers, right? Constantly, constantly. Good thought. Other ideas, folks. Other ideas. Other questions. Here we go.

Heather Enriquez. So the word that sticks with me is the word overflow, that it is the overflow of God's love that motivates us. And then I found the verse in Luke that says, *give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over will be put into your lap.* And that's just like a beautiful image, I think, of a way to fix my disordered loves as a way of responding to God's love, which just is overflowing.

Oh, that's great. And that is, that's a great, like, if we're, if we're turning to things, turning to people, turning to situations in life, because we are on empty, right? And instead of turning to God, we turn to these little trinkets instead to be the thing that overflows, like, if it's coming from an overflow, right? Like, these things are not essential. They're not necessary. They are in addition to what we already have, what we already possess. I mean, the Bible tells us in the book of Ephesians that all, all of the spiritual blessings are ours in Christ Jesus, all of them, right?

And if you live in that kind of mindset, then yeah, going for a run, that's a great thing. That's just a cherry on the top, right? Or, or not. Or, I don't, whatever. That's not, no, that's, yeah, that's a divine punishment for some of us. That's true. I'm with you, girl. Or a block of cheese, right? Or whatever it might be. Yeah, that's a great way of thinking about it. The overflow, right? That we are, that we are fully satisfied in God. And when we are, then like, yeah, the world is out there. He says, go and enjoy it, right? Go and enjoy it. Yeah, that's beautiful. Good. Other thoughts, questions, ideas. Use your actor voice. You're fine.

The God's my father and he's a great father idea in incorporating into like who I really am, I realized I can breathe. Yeah. Like it gives me the ability to just breathe and not have to, not have to worry. It's the whole enjoyment thing. It's like God gives me the ability to breathe.

Yeah, that's beautiful. Yeah, I like breathing. Yeah, I like, we like it that you're breathing. That's good. Yeah, you know, I had a counselor early on, great Christian counselor that sort of walked me through this, and they were saying, you know, like, yeah, you are lamenting all the things that you never had in a father, right? You're grieving that loss, he said, but you wouldn't even know what you were missing unless the father who stamped you in his image didn't exist, right, and help you understand those things? We're saying, like, all the things that you're longing for, all the things that you could like make the list of just like, I never had this, I never had this, I never had this, he didn't do this. He was like, yes. And those are all the things you go right down the list and you already have them in the father.

Like you, in some ways I was, I was more well equipped, right? I guess that's just what counselors do. They make you feel great about yourself. He was saying, you can imagine a dad who comes really close, right? That's a gift in its right to his kid, he said, but man, you're kind of a blank slate, right? And all of the longings of your heart are there because the father made you for relationship with him and you really do already have those things. And that was, it was just a big turning point for me, you know? And instead of just focusing constantly on what I didn't have here on earth to recognize it, like, hey, I can forgive my dad for not living up to the metaphor, right? He didn't do his job, but it doesn't mean I don't have one, right? And I have one to the full.

So, just to bring it home. So again, with this in our minds, right? Bring it back to the prodigal son, very familiar parable, probably one of Jesus' most famous. But to listen to it again, that when Jesus is trying to teach the people and he says, you want to understand what God is like? You want to know my father like I know my father? Let me tell you a story. Let me tell you a story and keep in mind this is, this is what my father is like, right? And so the son goes off, you know, the story, there's an inheritance there and he takes it early and he runs off to a foreign country and he blows it on wine and women and gambling and he finds himself at the end of the day eating the slop out of the pig trough and he says, all right, fine, I'll go home finally. I'll go home. And when I go home, I'll tell my dad, look, I'll just be your slave, right? I forfeited the right of being a child of yours. Trust me, I get it, but at least give me a place to come and sleep and eat.

And so the son arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to the servants, bring the best robe quickly and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet and bring the fattened calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and it is found and they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:20-24)

He's like, you want to get it. You want to hear a story about what my dad is like and it's helpful for us because I think no matter how much we teach here on it, no matter how many times we've gone from Old Testament, New Testament, talk about the full counsel of God's word. So many of us read the Old Testament and we get stuck in our head. That's got to be a different God. It's got to be a different God, right? Too much killing, too much justice, right? And then we get to Jesus and Jesus is saying, listen, if you misunderstood, if you misunderstood the story so far, let me tell you, this is who my father is and we can trust him because nobody knows the father more than Jesus.

Eternity past, right? He has always had a relationship with this father and he comes, the fullness of God, and says like, this is it. This is what it looks like. And again, to just bring it back all the way to the beginning to talk about like a fuller understanding of redemption is, right? This is confession. This is repentance, right? Like we've got those acts, right? His son is converted but there's so much more. There's so much more because after that the father doesn't say, okay, okay, fine. I forgive you. Now go feed the pigs, right? He says, no, no, wait. He says, get the ring, get the robe. Now we're going to celebrate, right? There's so much more. He probably has more of a relationship with his father than he ever did at the beginning obviously because he just wished him dead and took the inheritance and ran. He's got something so much more here and my father, he's saying, my father is like this, that if you confess and you repent and you come home, you are not just destined to a life of just like serving him begrudgingly the rest of your life. He welcomes you in and he says, you're back home. You are fully reconciled to me. Now let's celebrate. Let's enjoy. Let's enjoy the fact that I thought you were dead and now you're back home, right? That's a fuller understanding of the story of redemption and then it makes more sense.

We just preached on this a few weeks ago. Maybe it was a few years ago. I don't know how long we've been in Romans. It's been a very long time but Paul says *you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, father. The spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if we're children then we are heirs, heirs of God, fellow heirs with Christ.* And then Paul's challenge is he's like trying to get the Romans to understand there is so much more here people,

that we are choosing the lesser things,

that we're just kind of wallowing in it down here and there is so much more on offer,

that you become co heirs with Christ,

that he becomes your older brother,

that he welcomes you back home to this father, who not only is going to tolerate you but is going to welcome you in and grant you full access to himself as the Son of God has had from eternity, and you get to be a part of that.

I think the deepest longings of our heart are answered by that kind of gospel, right? That we get the transaction part of it. I feel guilty. I feel shameful. I'm a sinner. I need forgiveness. Yes, you have that and so much more, so much more than that.

Okay, we've got three or four minutes. Time to reflect on that. Think about it. What ways does that challenge you? What ways does that encourage you? What does a life look like moving forward with that kind of understanding of the gospel and what God is inviting you to?

Yes, Savannah. So similar to what you're saying about you having the perspective of God as king, I feel like I always enjoyed the perspective of God as sovereign, like a good Presbyterian. Yes, that's the right answer. That's the right answer. And that's something as a denomination that we do emphasize in particular is the sovereignty of the Lord. But if you don't believe that God is a loving father, then that is a terrifying concept. Absolutely. Because having a sovereign God that's not good and loving is a very, worst possible scenario. That is the worst possible scenario. So having the understanding of God as a loving father brings a lot of comfort and peace in his sovereignty, because then you actually believe scripture when it says things like he's working all things out for our good and believe scripture when it has, like when Jesus talked about how even you even you evil fathers give good gifts to your sons, like how much more is the heavenly father going to out of his overflowing love, pour out on his children. So I mean, yeah, from this book, that was the one reading this book a while back is what changed that for me. And it had a profound difference and specifically prayer and how I prayed to the father. I mean, it pretty profoundly changed that understanding him as loving.

Yeah, that's beautiful. You're right. Because many of us have experienced fathers who were definitely sovereign, right? Like they ruled a roost, right? You weren't going to cross the line. You knew that they were in control, but they use that power for harm and not for good. And so sometimes you're right. The emphasis on the fact that like he is absolutely in control, nothing happens apart from his will. And then you start to wonder, yeah, but is he good? Is he good? Because I have again, I haven't seen that modeled in my life. Absolute power, corrupts absolutely, right? Like I haven't seen a single situation where somebody held all the cards and didn't manipulate and then use it for their advantage, right? And so you're right. It's a deeper understanding. That's great. That's good.

Anybody else before we close up? Anybody else? Thoughts?

Yes, Emma Bailey. I'm saying this from personal experience that until we dig in and deal with our father wounds, our earthly father wounds, which can feel very vulnerable and overwhelming, because there would be so many of them and they run so deep. But until we do that, it's going to be very difficult to truly see God as a loving father. Like I may know that in my head, sing it at church, but there's a disconnect there until we really deal with the wounds of our earthly fathers. So just encouragement to those like me who did not have a loving protective earthly father that to dig in and deal with that and really get to those false beliefs about myself that were created because of the wounds of childhood. It is the most freeing and beautiful thing to start to come out on the other side of that. So just encouragement to do that, to find someone who you can dig into those wounds with, because there is such freedom on the other side, such freedom in that relationship with the father, to truly embrace the sweetness of that relationship.

That's good. Yeah, that is a good one to end on. Don, you're just telling me to wrap it up. Oh, you were going to say, and that's why we have a counseling center. That's what you were going to say.

That's right. I'm just saying that for a prodigal, there are some good fathers, that set example, that don't expect anything from you, and that's so encouraging, and hopefully make an example of that as the generations go. So, I had a good father. Yeah, you did. That's good. That's a good one to close on.

Heavenly Father, thank you, Lord, for revealing yourself as such, Lord, for using a language that we can understand. So desperate are you, Lord, to reveal yourself to your people, to be known, to be worshiped, Lord, to be surrendered to, Father, that you have given us the language and the ability to grab ahold of the amazing gift, Father, that through your son, we might have access again to a father who is, yes, sovereign, kind, full of hesed love, steadfast love, self-giving, sacrificial, agape love, Lord God. Father, I pray that you would help our hearts to grab ahold of the gift that is ours, that we would not settle, wouldn't settle for half of the gospel, Lord, but would press in, continue on, and we might be united with Christ and enjoy the full benefits of being in relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen