

HOPE CHURCH, FATHERS DAY 2008 (15 June)

KNOWING GOD AS FATHER

INTRODUCTION

Today is about family – Eliana's baptism.

Also special day for men in families – Fathers Day (9 months before Mothers Day!) – treated differently for once (breakfast in bed, gifts & cards, words of appreciation, treated like kings...?!)

Though for some of us, the word “father” brings unhappy memories, for most our father is someone we love and who we know loves us, though he and we may not always show it. Many of us men are also fathers ourselves, and it's a challenging role with no Instruction Manual or User Guide.

Fathers Day is a day to celebrate fathers. On this one day of the year given over to the man in the family, it's right that we should spend a little time thinking about what it means to be a father.

WHAT IS A FATHER? THE KIDS PERSPECTIVE

Kids quotes:

- A father is a man mother, but unlike a mother he isn't always on the phone. [Clare, aged 12]
- When anything goes wrong my dad is completely unbiased and blames me. [Michael, 12]
- Fathers are people that will fight with you but not hurt you. [Christine, 11]
- My dad is realey quite a tidy man for a Hells Angel. [Christopher, 12]
- Fathers are always right, and even if they're not right, they're never actually wrong. [Catherine, 12]

WHAT IS A FATHER REALLY? Two R's – Relationship and Responsibilities

RELATIONSHIP

Two P's – Personal and Permanent

- Personal – not an institution or a role. A father is a flawed man with a unique and irreplaceable link to another human being – his child. You can't be a father without having a child.
- Permanent – fatherhood is forever, an eternal relationship, indestructible, unchangeable. Not dependent on our response, reaction, feeling, permission, cultivation – or otherwise.

You can't choose or change your father, he is who he is, and always will be.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Two P's – Provision and Protection

- Provision – father is responsible to provide for his family
 - food, shelter, clothing, love, acceptance etc
 - the basic necessities of life
- Protection – father is responsible to take care of his family
 - safety, security (tangible)
 - guidelines, boundaries, discipline (less tangible)

Being a father isn't a free ride, comes with obligations.

GOD AS FATHER

All very challenging for us as fathers. But this isn't a parenting class, it's a church service. So why are we talking about this here?

"Father" is a word you hear often in church, but not used about the men – used for God. "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" – why?

People think about God in many ways, different images of him, mostly distorted:

- celestial power – remote, impersonal, no feelings, the Power that keeps the universe going, the "Other", not like us, unknowable
- grand old man – divine grandfather, very old, out of touch, irrelevant, unable to cope with modern life, living in the past, past it, slightly dotty
- heavenly policeman – killjoy, enforcing rules, restricting freedom, strict, makes us feel guilty, waiting to get us if we step out of line
- managing director – maintains the system, only interested in the bottom line, not concerned about individuals, stays in board room deciding strategy but never gets involved with shop-floor

Jesus brought unique idea of who God is – he taught that God is “Our Father” (e.g. Matthew 6:9 when he taught us to pray)

Jesus refers to God as Father 146 times in gospels. In fact for himself he always calls God “Father”, except once on the cross. But this is not a relationship he keeps for himself, he talks about “your Father and mine”, and “our Father”.

OT had concept of God as Father, but used Hebrew word “ab” = formal (e.g. Isaiah 63:16, 64:8)

Jesus and NT use “abba” = daddy = personal, intimate, closeness, affection

When we say “God is a Father”, what image does this bring to your mind?

Coloured by own experience, not always accurate or helpful.

What does Bible say? Using 2R = 2P + 2P

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AS FATHER

PERSONAL – John 1:12-13 “the right to become children of God”. Galatians 4:5, we have been “adopted as sons” – adoption is a choice, he didn’t have to. God wants to get “up close and personal” with each of us. You matter to him, he cares. “Cast all your cares on him, for he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7)

PERMANENT – God promises to look after us always. “No-one is able to snatch (you) out of the Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29)

GOD’S RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS US AS FATHER

PROVISION – He knows what we need (Matthew 6:31-33), and will supply every need (Philippians 4:19), because as a Father he loves to give us good things (Matthew 7:7-11). God our Father provides generously, sufficiently and wisely for us (Psalm 23:1).

PROTECTION – He will keep us safe, e.g. Psalm 91 (deliver, cover, refuge, guard, protect, rescue). God our Father is able and willing to protect us, he is on our side (Romans 8:31).

THE MISSING “P”

Today’s society is plagued by a new phenomenon – the absent father.

Many don’t know who their father is. Assisted pregnancies (artificial insemination, gene therapy, maybe one day cloning) mean some children may not even have an identifiable father. CSA set up to chase absent fathers and make them fulfil their responsibilities towards their children.

Important question – is God an “absent Father”? Is he defaulting on his relationship, not fulfilling his responsibilities?

The one missing “P” is PRESENCE.

The most important gift a father can give his child is himself.

Popular book “The sixty-second father” – really?

- Scientific American research asked fathers in US how long they spent talking with their children each day. Then men guessed at 15-20 minutes. The researchers then measured what actually happened, and found an average of 40 seconds per day, split into three encounters of 10-15 seconds each.
- Of course it's different in UK right? Wrong! Similar research here found fathers talking to their children for an average of 3 minutes per day – better than US but still not very good.

A father needs to be present for his children

- There when needed, always available and accessible, always accepting, never rejecting

What about God?

- The phrase “I am with you” is repeated throughout the Bible (Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Jeremiah...).
- Another repeated phrase “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:5; 1 Kings 8:57, 1 Chronicles 28:20; Hebrews 13:5)

God is always with us, even if we don't always feel it. (Psalm 139:1-12)

CONCLUSION

God is “our Father” for those who have been adopted into his family.

If this is not yet you, the invitation is open, he wants to be your Father too. He describes himself as “Father of the fatherless” (Psalm 68:5), so even if your role model of personal experience is poor, God can step in and be your father.

Despite our flawed human experience of our own fathers, and perhaps ourselves as fathers, there is one perfect Father, who can be our role model, and who will never let us down.

On this Fathers Day, as well as honouring our own father, let's honour our Father in heaven.

Let's thank him for who he is and what he does, let's enjoy his presence, and let's determine to keep a close relationship with him.