

God Carrying us as our Loving Father
Selected Texts
August 13, 2023

Prayer

All summer we've been in the book of Psalms, exploring different metaphors that describe God and how we can engage with Him. We began in June with the transcendent, Almighty God who looks down on us from heaven. Every Sunday after that we watched as those metaphors became closer and more intimate—king, shepherd, guide, friend. Today we wrap up this series with the most intimate picture of all—God as our Father who supports us, lifts us and carries us.

Listen to how this metaphor is expressed in the Psalms. Don't worry about taking notes. Just look at them and see if any images come to your mind.

Psalms 18:16, 18, 35

¹⁶ [The LORD] reached down from heaven and rescued me; he drew me out of deep waters.

I think of a little boy falling out of a boat and quickly being plucked from the water by his father...suddenly moved from danger to safety.

¹⁸ They attacked me at a moment when I was in distress, but the LORD supported me.

When at her weakest moment, her father stepped in to offer support.

³⁵ You have given me your shield of victory.

Your right hand supports me; your help has made me great.

Psalms 37:23-24

²³ The LORD directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.

²⁴ Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the LORD holds them by the hand.

I see the four year old showing a delighted parent his newest art work or the toddler losing her balance but holding her daddy's hand keeps her from falling.

Psalms 54:4

Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me.

I never worried about food as a child. I was sustained.

Psalms 68:19

¹⁹ Praise the Lord; praise God our savior! For each day he carries us in his arms.

A beautiful image of loving support and safety.

Psalms 139:9-10

⁹ If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans,

¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

No matter where I go, my loving father is there. I am never beyond His reach

Psalms 145:14

¹⁴ The LORD helps the fallen and lifts those bent beneath their loads.

Think of the video we saw earlier this service. The Father lifts those bent under their load of concern and worry.

If you have memories of a time when a parent stepped in to help or carry you, then you have a personal encounter with ways the Lord acts as a strong father for you.

I can remember a time when I was about four years old. Standing on the crowded sidewalk, I could only catch glimpses of the parade as it passed by. Then I felt strong and gentle hands surround my chest and under my arms as I was effortlessly lifted to my father's shoulders. All of a sudden, I was in the sunshine with the best seat in the crowd.

How many times has the Lord lifted me out of the shadows to offer me a new perspective, freedom and experience?

After I graduated from college my father encouraged me to step out and try whatever I wanted to do. "Don't worry about failing," he said to me. "If things don't work out, you won't fall far. I'll be your safety net."

How many times has the Lord given me courage to do things or caught me before or even after I fell?

Simply knowing that there is a strong arm to hold or a resource to draw from can make all the difference in the world. My dad wasn't perfect. None in this world are. And I know that there are some listening to my voice for whom the metaphor of God as our loving Father is something beyond their reach.

It is even possible that some feel emotion or anger as I talk, wondering if they should slip out the back door or turn off their screen. I've been through enough life to get it. Some childhood experiences are so traumatic that they create a barrier that keeps the wounded person from ever seeing or experiencing the Lord in this important way.

If this is you, I want you to know that you are not alone. While the path you are on is a hard one, there is hope.

Last June, Gerry Keen pulled me aside and said he felt like it was time to publicly share some of his story. As we talked, I said, "Ya know, I think the sermon on August 13 may be a day you can do that." He was scheduled for knee replacement on Thursday and thought he'd be okay by Sunday to offer his story in person. I said, "Maybe we ought to do this by video just in case you are not fully recovered yet."

It might feel a little intense for some, but it is from his heart to ours. Here is Gerry's story.

Gerry's Story (video)

Every earthly father falls short of clearly showing our heavenly father's love...and some fail miserably, leaving wounded children in their wake. At some level we all need healing, and when the wounds run deep that healing may take a while, but it can come.

God is not a disappointed father who makes impossible demands and then gets angry at us for not meeting his expectations. The truth of who God is comes to us from Scripture and not our experience in this fallen world. One of the hardest things we must do is live in the light of what Scripture says about God rather than the picture we have created.

When we begin to see who God actually is, we will run *to* Him rather than *from* Him.

No matter where you are in your intimacy with your heavenly father, let this Sunday become another step in your journey toward living with the confidence of your heavenly father's loving support.

Perhaps the best way to think about this is from the parent's perspective. If you have children, or you are hoping to have children, what is it that you long for them or that you want to see in them? What kind of life do you want them to enjoy? What character traits do you want them to have? How do you hope they will relate to friends and strangers? What do you want their mental attitude to be when they encounter success or failure.

Now, what if you could pursue all your hopes and dreams for your children without the impatience or angry outbursts or moments when you said the wrong thing. What if you knew your child so completely—even knowing their emotions and thoughts—that you could love them perfectly? If you could do that, then you would be like your Heavenly Father.

Psalm 139:1-4

¹ You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

If your father is a tyrant, then the thought of him having this kind of information on you is terrifying. But if your Father is gentle and humble of heart. Loves you deeply and only acts in ways that are for your good, then this knowledge brings tremendous comfort and hope. A father with this kind of knowledge knows your limitations and so will only expect you to do what you can do. You are free to be you.

Let's take the parental perspective another step deeper. Since the Father knows your limits, He celebrates what you *can* do. He celebrates the child who takes the gospel to other countries, builds God-honoring businesses, or accomplishes great things, *and to the same degree and in the same way* He loves, accepts and celebrates His child who finally learns to put on his socks or use a fork.

Do you see the freedom in this? Can you feel the wonder of God as your Father caring for and carrying you through all of life's moments?

Knowing you have this kind of support frees you to try and succeed or fail without worry for the outcome. It frees you to no longer be concerned with what others think of you or even what you think of you. It frees you to no longer need to prove yourself to anyone or seek to promote yourself in any way.

The impact of this kind of freedom allows us to take our attention off ourselves and to give our full attention to those around us...to love others well. No matter what you may have experienced in this broken world, you and I can be free in our Heavenly Father's love.

I think back to an amazing promise we learned about in James 4:7-8.

So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

⁸ Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.

The Father's love leads to humility and helps me rest in the confidence that God is involved, He is good and can be trusted to do His work in my life. It is not all up to me.

This confidence helps us put up our hand and say "No" to the tempter as we put our arms out and say "Yes" to God. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." Isn't this the most amazing promise? It shows up in Zechariah and Malachi and other places in Scripture.

When the prodigal son decided to return to his father, he found his father looking for him, and running out to meet him. If you take a step toward God, He will take steps toward you.

So, take a step. I close by offering three options that could be your next step.

Oftentimes your first step—the place to begin—is with identifying your picture of God and comparing it to what the Scripture says. Make your list. Take a moment and write down your answers to questions like:

- How would you describe God? What images or words would you use?
- When you think of God, what emotion do you feel (if any)?
- When God thinks of you, what emotion does He feel?
- When God thinks of you, what expression is on His face?
- What is God's primary emotion when you blow it in some way?
- Asked another way, when your fever is high and your sin-sickness is pronounced, does your Father yell at you or does He bring you fluids, Tylenol and a cold compress for your forehead as He comforts you with His love?

As you make your list, also make a list of what Scripture teaches. Look at the verses that talk about God's opinion of you (not just about His character). Along the way it may be helpful to also read a book like Dane Ortlunds, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*, or anything that speaks of how the Scripture reveals God. First option, make a list that describes the picture you have of God then spend time in Scripture, list what it reveals about God and then compare the two lists.

Second option, engage in this week's prayer practice. Every day take some time, even as little as 60 seconds, and talk to God as a young child going to their father. Go to Him as your abba, as a daddy who knows everything about you, loves you and can be fully trusted. Share your heart and then be open to how God will respond to you in the day ahead.

Final option, register online for the fall semester of Thrive. It begins September 17, runs for ten Sundays and will offer some foundational principles for relating to God, His people and this world.

This week, may I encourage us all to go daily to God with the honesty of a little child talking with their trusted father. He knows your desires, emotions, pain and secrets so trust Him with what is going on in your life. Tell Him what you want, tell Him what you need, listen throughout the day for His reply, and let Him carry you through all the events of the day ahead.

Prayer

Lord, in our heads we know you to be an awesome, unconditionally loving, and forgiving Father—one who is perfect in all your ways, flawless in wisdom, one who completes and heals us. This is who you are, our loving, ever-present Father, someone in whom we can put our complete trust.

We know this in our heads but we each struggle to feel it in our hearts and live it in our days. Please provide the healing we need so that we can live in the freedom you offer. Thank you for your faithfulness to your promises, and your faithfulness to us. Amen

See what great love the father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God, *and that is what we are.* 1 John 3:1

The conclusion: God knows all the best and worst of you. Nothing is hidden. Even your motives are clear to Him. Even so, He loves you with a perfect Father's steadfast love.