



Grace Chapel Ironmen Summer Devotional Series

~ Dave Buehring ~

Ironmen Summer Devotional Series

Our Father: An Introduction

When teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus told them to begin by saying "Our Father". With those two simple words, Jesus revealed much to His disciples about the relationship His Father desires to have with us. Not only is God the Father of our Lord Jesus, but He's also OUR Father in Heaven - YOUR Father and MY Father!

Throughout the four Gospels, we see that Jesus loved His Father, enjoyed His Father's presence and provision, and followed His Father's lead. He worshiped His Father, prayed to His Father and glorified His Father in all that He did. He also revealed His Father to those around Him so they too could know His love, affirmation and affection. He knew what it was to be a "beloved son" in whom His Father was "well pleased". He also delighted in the fact that His relationship with His Father was not limited to His time here on earth but would be carried on forever into eternity in His "Father's House"!

In walking alongside men for nearly four decades now, I've found that experiencing God as one's Father in Heaven remains one of a man's core needs and yet its one of his greatest hurdles. The problem is that often huge hills of hurt from our earthly fathers - and/or other authority figures during our childhood - hinder a man from easily and clearly seeing what their Father in Heaven is really like. The good news is that He longs to show Himself to you and me - and He already has but we may not have yet connected the dots! He desperately desires for you to experience His love - just as a dad's desire for their children is to be showered with their love.

Many years ago, when I was in my early twenties, I dove in to the book of John to learn more about God as my Father. Within that single New Testament book, Jesus references God as "Father" some 116 times! I'd recommend a read through John this summer with a colored pencil in hand to highlight every time you come across "Father". Either way, I plan to seed you with some perspective once each week throughout the months of June, July and August to aid you in a fresh discovery of YOUR Father in Heaven.

I love you guys!
Dave

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Our Father's Capacity (Week 2)

Capacity. It represents what we each have that can be passed on to those around us. Our dad's had this, and so did our grandfathers. I've got it as a dad, and so does my son as a brand new father. And, you've got it too!

My dad's capacity has immensely blessed my life – and has left me wanting. Why, because he's been a bad dad? No, not at all! He's given me everything he could and for that I'm very grateful. I continue to give my son everything I've got – what's mine is his. Yet, it's impossible for me to meet his every need. Why? Because his needs – and mine – are greater than the capacity of any father on this earth.

Consider with me for a moment the words that launch The Lord's Prayer, *"Our Father, which art in Heaven"*. Look at those words again. *YOU* have a Father who has Heavenly capacity! *YOUR* Father in Heaven is not limited to the capacity of fathers that walk this planet – instead He is absolutely limitless! His love for you is everlasting. His power to transform you is boundless. His ability to intervene on your behalf is infinite. His realigning hand on your life is inexhaustible!

Check out the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:31-33: *"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*

Listen to Jesus' counsel and instruction to you: *Therefore don't be anxious...your heavenly Father knows that you need them all...seek first the Kingdom of God...and His righteousness...and all these things will be added to you.*

Can you hear *YOUR* heavenly Father's heart for you? Read it again, and again, and again until this marks your soul. Regardless of the capacity of your earthly father, you now have a heavenly Father who has the capacity to meet *YOUR* needs – large and little. Per Jesus's words, seek Him first and watch what He will do on *YOUR* behalf!

This week, allow the volume of your heavenly Father's voice to rise above the inner noise of any past negative father experiences. It's time to move towards fully trusting *YOUR* heavenly Father – His character and ways – while tapping in to His vast reserves stored up for *YOU!*

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Our Father is Good (Week 3)

When a son thinks about his father, certain things mark his memories. It may be the way his father related to him or his family. It might be certain personality traits, a set of skills or successes that his dad was known for. It could be his faith or his faithfulness of character. Or it may be a moment in time where his father left a remarkable reference point or an unforgettable stain on a son's soul. Regardless, that mark has left an impression on how we view our dad's today.

Speaking of impressions, what are the first thoughts and feelings that blow past your soul when your heavenly Father is mentioned? Are they positive or negative? Do they draw you to pursue Him further or do they push you away from Him?

I remember at a leaders gathering in Montana some twenty years ago, pastor and author, Jerry Cook, said, *"You know, God is not a big one of us – or a big one of our fathers!"* What a wonderful truth! Regardless of the love or lack of our earthly fathers, this truth lets us approach our heavenly Father through a fresh set of lenses, allowing the Scriptures to shape our hearts around what He's *really* like!

As we renew our minds about God as our Father, an important first-impression for us to have is that He is GOOD! Look at what the Scriptures have to say about this:

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father..."
~ James 1:17

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"
~ Matthew 7:11

Every good thing that comes your way in life comes from your heavenly Father as a personal gift! He is a Father that delights in giving His sons good gifts! His initial attitude towards you, His thoughts towards you, His actions on your behalf, and His heart for you is GOOD! This is the truth – you just may not yet see it because of all the marks left on your mind from your earthly authority figures.

This week, I want to encourage you to lean in a little closer and let Him reveal where He's been good to you in days gone by and at this very moment. The truth is He is GOOD – and He wants you to experience His goodness over and over again. Embrace Him and enjoy His goodness. He's all yours!

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Our Father is With You (Week 4)

I remember a survey that was taken a number of years ago where a question was asked of followers of Jesus, "have you ever experienced God's presence?" To my amazement, 80% of those who took the survey answered "no"! How would you answer that question? Do you know in your "knower" that He's "with you"?

Jesus said, "I am with you always" (Mt.28:20). Like all truth, we need to have that moved from concept to heart and from something we read about to something we experience first-hand. How long does it take for you to recognize God's presence with you? Can you pause and dial in to His "with you" within a few minutes when needed? Or, do you "catch whiffs" of His Presence on Sunday mornings in worship and through the Word – but beyond that no so much?

Sometimes this presence or nearness thing is a direct result of our closeness to our earthly dads – physically, emotionally, relationally and spiritually. The good news is in Jesus we can grow way beyond that! Here's a few more of the many "with you's" found in Scripture and promises linked with them:

Gen.26:3, 24 – *"I will be **with you** and will bless you...Fear not, for I am **with you**..."*

Gen.28:15 – *"I am **with you** and will keep you wherever you go..."*

Ex.33:14 – *"And he said, 'My presence will go **with you**, and I will give you rest.'"*

Deut.20:4 – *"...the Lord your God is he who goes **with you** to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory."*

Deut.23:16 – *"He shall dwell **with you**, in your midst..."*

Deut.31:6 – *"Be strong and courageous...for it is the Lord your God who goes **with you**. He will not leave you or forsake you."*

Pause for a moment to allow what these Scriptures reveal to get deep inside of you. You have a Father in Heaven who is **with you**...to bless you; to replace fear with strength and courage; to keep you wherever you go; to give you rest; to fight for you and give you victory; and to dwell with you always, never leaving or forsaking you.

Drink it in godly man! This week, ask the Holy Spirit to help move these "with you's" from concepts to heart, from something read to something experienced!

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Our Father Wants You To Know Him (Week 5)

I remember the first time I understood the difference between knowing about God and really knowing Him. It was illustrated through my “relationship” with my childhood baseball hero, Willie Mays. When asked what I knew about Willie, I stated that he played for the San Francisco Giants, wore #24, batted third in the lineup and played centerfield. I could list his batting average, how many hits and home runs he had, and how many times he made the All-Star Team. I knew that “The Say Hey Kid” was born on May 6, 1931 in Alabama. Heck, I even had an autographed baseball from him!

Then, when asked, “have you ever spent time with Willie, getting to know what his personality and character are like?”, of course, my answer was “no”. And, there it was – the dawning of the difference! The reality was my “relationship” with Willie was based on *knowing about him* – not *knowing him*.

When you apply this same reality to your life today – do you know lots about your heavenly Father or do you really know Him? Do you know His personality and character to the point that you can trust Him with your day-to-day life?

Something I’ve learned over the years is that the image of our Father in Heaven we carry around in our hearts and minds affect the way we live our daily lives. Our Father wants us to know Him and experience Him for ourselves. Because He desires for us to know Him, He’s revealed much about Himself all throughout the Scriptures!

Some of you have seen my bible. It’s been marked up over the years in purple pencil where I’ve highlighted every Name, Title and Character Attribute of God that I’ve come across. Why? Because I want Who He really is to shout at me from the pages of His Word. You see, you’re not the only one that needs fresh perspective on our heavenly Father! I need it too – and this is one of the primary ways my mind can be renewed and my heart gets fresh revelation so I can know and experience more.

How might you begin to get to know your heavenly Father more beginning this week? He desires to show you more of Who He is! And what’s cool is that in doing so, not only will you experience Him in greater ways, but you’ll also, somehow in the process, become even more like Him!

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Our Father is Slow to Anger (Week 6)

Anger. It's one of those things in life that when experienced can leave a lasting mark. It is often expressed in pain-filled words that pierce places within one's soul. The facial expressions and physical acts of violence that often accompany anger and rage can also cause great damage spiritually, emotionally, in our thinking about God and ourselves, and in how we relate with those around us.

If you've encountered regular doses anger, you most likely believe this is also how your Father in heaven responds to you. You may wrestle with a vague sense that He's perpetually upset with you and on the verge of "blowing His heavenly stack"! And, guess what? The enemy of your soul, Satan, wants to do all he can to reinforce that lie and rob you from actually enjoying your heavenly Father!

So, let's counterattack. Did you know that nine times in the Scriptures, while referring to God, the phrase "slow to anger" is used? Nine times covers us once for each day of the week and twice on weekends! Here's a look at three of them:

*"The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, **slow to anger**, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness..." Ex.34:6*

*"You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, **slow to anger** and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them." Ne.9:17*

*"You are a gracious God and merciful, **slow to anger** and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster." Jo.4:2*

Many of us have received the brunt of anger when failing or not living up to someone's expectations. However, based on what these passages reveal to us about our heavenly Father, how does He respond to our failures?

His everyday attitude towards you is merciful and gracious. He is slow to anger. He is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness towards you. He is ready to forgive you. He will not forsake you in the midst of your failure. He works on your behalf to remedy disaster.

Now there's some really good stuff to chew on and digest throughout this week! Ask Jesus for revelation of these things within your heart and a renewing of your thinking.

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Our Father is Big-Hearted (Week 7)

Several years ago, my son, Ryan, came to me to chat about his honeymoon. He had recently become engaged and was exploring options on where he and his new bride could celebrate together for a week. As I listened, I found myself looking for ways to come alongside of him in this special moment of his life. After talking with Cheryl, we decided to gift him and Kyndall with the use of our annual timeshare so they could go anywhere they wanted. They chose to spend a wonderful week on Kauai, adding value of those memorable days of their lives!

Now, what happened behind the scenes in my heart? Ryan didn't have to plead, poke or prod to get me there. He didn't have to manipulate me or work out some kind of a special deal. Because HE'S MY SON, my heart was exploding inside of me to bless him! My delight was for him to be absolutely delighted!

The truth is we serve an incredibly generous and big-hearted God! I remember when I was young reading John 3:16, landing one day on the emphasis, "For God so loved the world THAT HE GAVE..." By His very nature God, our Heavenly Father is generous: a consistent, big-hearted, delighted-to-do-so-over-and-over kind of giver!

Sometimes I find I can get stuck on this front by not seeing through right lenses – with *what, how, when* and *through whom* He is generous! Yes, there are things I ask God for – some of which He graciously gives to me. But more often than not, He's given to me way more than I've recognized, especially when I deserve nothing at all! And on top of that, I don't stop to say a specific "thanks for that" to Him as often as I should.

Consider with me for a moment, how has God given generously to you? I want you to look at this through a different set of lenses. Yes, see the "big blessings" but make sure you also look at another kind of God's giving: providential blessings.

Providential blessings include things like how your heart continues to beat without you thinking about it. The ability to lie down at night in "sleep mode" knowing that somehow you still keep breathing! This also includes His benefits in the midst of a day on your behalf via divine connections, new opportunities, needed provision, supernatural protection and perfect timing! I promise you, the closer you look, the more you'll see!

You have a Father in Heaven who is big-hearted towards you! As He reveals His generous hand in your life, be sure to be generous in return in your giving of thanks!

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" ~ Matthew 7:11

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Our Father Brings Correction (Week 8)

Probably like me, correction and discipline was a part of your childhood. Among other things, it was for our own protection, so we would grow in character and responsibility, and so we'd walk rightly with those around us. Sometimes the correction was gentle and instructive, other times it was quite painful both physically (think spanking) and consequentially. Done well and out of love, correction and discipline is meant to play a key role in developing who we become as godly adults.

From our Heavenly Father's vantage point, correction in the form of discipline doesn't stop when we become "grown-ups". It's exercised throughout our lives as His sons. Take a look with me at what Hebrews 12:5-11 tells us about this:

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

A few practical takeaways from this passage: Don't regard your Heavenly Father's discipline lightly. Don't grow weary of it. You are loved and received as His son. We need to submit ourselves to our Heavenly Father's discipline. He disciplines us for our good – that we may be more like Him. It seems painful in the present, yet later it will yield peace, fruit and righteousness if we let Him train us by it.

Have you considered that some of your current life circumstances may actually be your Heavenly Father bringing some loving correction through discipline to your life? Might be worth the time, some prayer and godly counsel to take a good look at. Remember, it's one of the ways He expresses that you're His very own and how much He loves you!

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Our Father is Attentive (Week 9)

It's another day in the life of a little boy. He's been busy both inside and out while dad's been away at work. The day started with getting his room picked up, although it took longer than planned because he needed to play with the little truck he had lost for the last month behind his dresser. Then, after his cheese crackers snack, he headed outside to pitch the seventh-game of the World Series, repeatedly smacking his ball up against the garage door. To his great delight, he won the game in the bottom of the ninth! Following some reenergizing by the peanut butter and jelly sandwich made by mom, he roamed into the wooded area of his backyard to spend his afternoon.

While watching the birds flying in and out of the trees, it dawned on him that they didn't have a house to live in. So, he began to create a little one-bedroom home for them to share. He leaned broken branches up against each other and padded the floor with the soft leaves from around his feet. Mom even had some birdseed in the garage he could use to make sure they had some food in their new kitchen!

Stepping back in to the house, he waited. And sure enough, the birds came! He watched intently as they flew in and out enjoying the shade and food he had provided for them. He could hardly wait to show his daddy what he had made!

Several hours later, dad arrived home, wiped out from a tough day at work. The little boy did everything in his power to get his dad outside to see his wonderful creation, but dad was distracted, preoccupied and unattentive.

Question: *is this how you picture your Heavenly Father?* If so, I'm excited to tell you that that is simply not the case! Our earthly dad's do the very best they can, but like you and me, are at times limited by their own human needs and cares. Not so with your Heavenly Father!

According to Psalm 139:1-18, our Father is intimately attentive to you, your greatest needs, your deepest desires – and your little creations! *He knows when we sit down and rise up. He discerns our thoughts from afar. He is acquainted with all our ways. He is fully present with/for us wherever we are. His hands are there to lead and hold us. In His book every one of our days are written!*

I want to encourage you to take some time this week and renew your heart and mind by reading through and reflecting on this portion of Psalm 139. Your Heavenly Father is so attentive to you that He's already waiting for you! So come on, join Him and listen to what He'd like to say to you!

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Our Father is Committed & Affectionate (Week 10)

I remember well the moment I became a father. I had just finished playing in a softball tournament in Kona, Hawai'i when it was suddenly time for Cheryl and I to make our way to the hospital! About eight hours later, at 1:52 AM on May 28th, Ryan David was born! With that birth came the birthing of new experiences within my heart. I quickly discovered that I had an incredible inner commitment to give my new little guy anything and everything I had that would benefit his life. Equally so, I found a fresh bubbling up of fatherly affection that desired to be poured in and over him without measure!

Do you know that your Heavenly Father experiences YOU through these same lenses? The exception is, of course, that He experiences it a "gazillion" times more than we ever can!

The Scriptures reveal God's desire for us in 1 John 3:1: *"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"* Here's a Scriptural sampling of your Heavenly Father's lavish expressions of commitment and affection towards YOU:

- His commitment to move and act on YOUR behalf, *"but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Romans 5:8
- His affection that compels Him to remove every barrier of YOU receiving it: *"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Romans 8:38-39
- His commitment to YOUR welfare and future: *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."* Jeremiah 29:11
- His affection for YOU that simply cannot be contained: *"The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."* Zephaniah 3:17

You may have received amazing amounts of commitment and affection from your earthy dad. Or, maybe some of each or possibly more of one than the other. Dads try to give the best of what they've got to their children, so receive every expression of commitment and affection that your dad has been able to give you. At the same time, begin a fresh pursuit today to receive and delight in the unending abundance of commitment and affection that YOUR Heavenly Father delights to shower on YOU! Watch for it, take it in, and give thanks!

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Our Father's Family (Week 11)

A day in my family began with devotions around the breakfast table. Walking the dog, doing dishes, vacuuming, taking out the garbage, lawn care and homework were weekly chores. Weekend activities included playing, watching or attending sports events. Sundays were all about Sunday School and church life. Summers were filled with Little League baseball, visits to Grandpa and Grandma's farm, and fishing on The Lake of the Woods. My family life also involved several out-of-state relocations, landing my brother and I in numerous rounds of "the new kid" experience!

Our Heavenly Father intends for family to be a place of blessing: where one experiences belonging and love; value based on who they are; equipping for life and the mutual meeting of needs; a standing "with" through thick and thin; a launchpad of destiny; and a godly legacy to pass on to the next generation.

Regardless of our personal family backgrounds, as followers of Jesus, we've all become a part of The Family of God! His "forever family" is made up of men and women, young and old, those in Heaven and on Earth, representing every tribe, tongue, people and nation from every era of history! He's your Heavenly Father and you are a part of His family – expressed through His Church – where He desires for you to experience the kinds of family blessings mentioned above!

Here are a handful of scriptures from Ephesians 1 & 2 that reflect these kinds of familial blessings:

1:3 – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ **with every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places.*

1:4 – *He **chose us** in him before the foundation of the world.*

1:5 – ***in love He adopted us** as sons in Jesus Christ.*

1:7-8 – *In him we have **redemption** through his blood, the **forgiveness** of our trespasses, according to **the riches of his grace**, which he **lavished** upon us.*

1:11 – *In him **we have obtained an inheritance.***

2:4-5 – *God, being rich in mercy, **because of the great love with which he loved us**, even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ.***

2:8-9 – *For **by grace you have been saved** through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is **the gift of God**, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

2:10 – *For **we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

2:19 – *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are **fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.***

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Our Father's Focus (Week 12)

I enjoyed the season of my life when I was an “everyday dad” to my children, Ryan and Malia. You know, that time in life when your kids are living at home. I understand that I’ll always have the joy and privilege of being their father but there was something special about having them under my roof during those growing-up years. Some days I miss that period of life, although I really enjoy them now as adults! And, with their spouses and a new grandson in our lives our family keeps expanding and I love that!

When my children were growing up my focus as a father was on three things: *loving them well; shaping them around God's ways; and guiding them towards life purpose.* Was this easy? No. Did I do it perfectly? Nope. Did everything always go just like I envisioned it? Of course not! Nevertheless, with the grace of Jesus and teaming with Cheryl, we gave everything we had!

Although we as earthly dads come up short some of the time, our Heavenly Father’s focus of loving us well, molding us into the image of Jesus and launching us into our destiny is perfect all of the time! To recognize how He does this we need to put on His “set of lenses” so we can better cooperate with what He’s up to! Take a look at these three expressions through His lenses.

“God so loved the world that He GAVE...” is the familiar start to the passage from John 3:16. Our Heavenly Father loves you so much that He gives and gives and gives some more! Consider for a moment how many unearned and undeserved relationships, things, opportunities and blessings surround your life! As your Heavenly Father, He is the Source of everything good! *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”* (James 1:17) Enjoy His multiple expressions of love for you and offer Him back much thanks and praise!

“For those whom he foreknew he...conformed to the image of his Son...” (Romans 8:29). When you gave your life to Jesus, your Heavenly Father’s heart was to form your heart and character to be more like Jesus. Submitting to this process allows you – through your own personality and skin – to live more like Him and reflect Him more accurately to the world around you! Even tough and disappointing life circumstances that come our way can be turned for good in our lives as mentioned in the previous verse (8:28), *“and we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”* Trust Him completely in everything that comes your way and you’ll grow to look even more like Him!

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10) There are dreams that your Heavenly Father has for your life – stuff He has in His heart from before you were even born! Have you asked Him to reveal His plan to you? Is it possible that even though you haven’t yet “hit your stride” that He is actively building you towards your future paths of purpose? The key here is walking in one obedience step at a time. Obeying what He asks you to do today prepares you for an effective and fruitful future that can bring great glory to His Name!

Your Heavenly Father’s focus is fully upon you! Celebrate that today and yield yourself fully to it!