

### “Who Needs a Father?”

Luke 11:1 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

2 He said to them, “When you pray, say: “‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.

3 Give us each day our daily bread.

4 Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”

5 Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ 7 And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

9 “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

11 “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

I want to thank the PNC, Sylvia, Corliss, and Tami for their hard work in finding the ideal pastor to lead you in the days ahead.

It has been said that the ideal pastor (1) preaches exactly 20 minutes and then sits down, (2) Condemns sin by never hurts anyone’s feelings, (3) works from eight in the morning until ten at night and never gets tired, (4) Is

26 years old and has been preaching for 30 years, in 20 minute increments, of course, (5) Has a burning desire to work with teens but spends much time with senior citizens, (6) Makes fifteen calls a day on church members, yet evangelizes the unchurched at record pace, and (7) does all the above without ever being out of the office when you call. (Scott Daniels, *The First 100 Days*, pp. 73-74)

As I said, Sylvia, Corliss, and Tami are to be thanked for their hard work in finding the ideal pastor to lead you in the days ahead. Alas, that person was unable to come, so they settled for me.

Allow me to wish you a happy Father's Day. I am delighted to be here this morning, and joined by my wife, Beth, and my son, Mark, and my daughter, Rachel. I consider myself a very fortunate man.

I was not always so fortunate. My parents divorced when I was 13 years old, and my relationship with my father was strained until 2005, when he suddenly died of a heart attack. I spent my teenage years as an angry, self-absorbed, aimless, and fatherless young man.

I am forever grateful for the men who came into my life during those years, and who became surrogate fathers for me, among them were Richard Herman, Bob Jensen, Bill Adams and Allan Loux. They encouraged me, challenged me, disciplined me, and invited me into the fellowship of men. I would not be who I am today without their influence.

Some of you had wonderful, godly fathers. Some of you never met your father. Some of you did not have a good relationship with your father. Some of you had fathers who went off to war and never returned. And we have all been influenced by men who played a fatherly role.

It is common in some academic circles today to argue that fathers are unnecessary. With the advent of in vitro fertilization, women can now choose to have children without the need of a man present in their lives. While the concept of marriage is being debated in the courts and on the editorial page and the blogs, people are pairing up and having children, and then splitting up. Divorce is more common now than when my parents divorced in 1970. Some argue that there is no real need for fathers today.

However, there are some sobering statistics that beg the question. There is no question that children who grow up in fatherless homes have a much greater risk of major challenges in life than those who grow up with a father at home. These statistics are alarming and should give any father pause.

24.7 million American children live in single parent homes, that's 36.3% of kids in America.

***Suicide.*** 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of the Census)

***Behavioral Disorders.*** 90% of runaways and homeless

children come from fatherless homes. 85% of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes. (United States Center for Disease Control)

***High School Dropouts.*** Children from fatherless homes are

twice as likely to drop out of school. 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes (National Principals Association Report on the State of High Schools.)

***Educational Attainment.*** Children in fatherless homes are

one tenth as likely to get A's in school. Kids living in single-parent homes or in step-families report lower educational expectations on the part of their parents, less parental monitoring of school work, and less overall social supervision than children from intact families. (N.M. Astore and S. McLanahan, American Sociological Review, No. 56 (1991))

***Juvenile Detention Rates.*** 85% of all youth in prison come from fatherless homes. Up from 70% in 1988.

***Aggression.*** In a longitudinal study of 1,197 fourth-grade

students, researchers observed "greater levels of aggression in boys from mother-only households than from boys in mother-father households." (N. Vaden-Kierman, N. Ialongo, J. Pearson, and S. Kellam, "Household Family Structure and Children's Aggressive Behavior: A Longitudinal Study of Urban Elementary School Children," Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology 23, no. 5 (1995). (Statistics on Fatherless Children in America by Wayne Parker, About.com Guide, [http://fatherhood.about.com/od/fathersrights/a/fatherless\\_children.htm](http://fatherhood.about.com/od/fathersrights/a/fatherless_children.htm))

That's pretty stark, isn't it? But it is not new. God saw the need for fathers at creation, when God made a man and a woman. In the text from Deuteronomy 10, from the early days of Israel's formation, God shows special concern for three classes of people; the widow, the fatherless, and the foreigner.

He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. (Deuteronomy 10:18)

In the ancient near east, widows and the fatherless were particularly vulnerable, as they had no legal standing to own property, and it was extremely difficult to earn a living where women were not really able to work outside the home. So God instructs Israel to have special compassion on widows, the fatherless, and the foreigner, because God has special compassion on them.

God also set up a system where if a married man died, that man's unmarried brother was to marry the widow, and raise the children as his own. God knew the importance of fathers.

We are rediscovering the importance of fathers today. In his book "The Fatherless Generation", John Sowers writes about the yearning for fathers in today's culture, describing our crisis of fatherlessness:

We are a generation seriously searching for Dad. Fatherlessness has become the new cultural norm. This story is being written into the lives of my generation. A story that can be heard in our songs, seen in our movies, read in our blogs. A story of grief and pain, of loneliness and rejection. A story that desperately needs to be heard.

[Sowers goes on] In the BBC reality show *Monastery*, a group of five men from diverse backgrounds voluntarily join a Benedictine monastery for a span of forty days. The five men don't have to assent to Christian beliefs, but they do have to respect and follow the monks' communal requirements— a strict rhythm of meals, silence, prayer times, and so on.

One of the stories focused on a man named Tony, a producer of soft-core pornography. After some time in the monastery, Tony felt torn: he wanted to keep his job, but he didn't want to lose the peace he was experiencing in the monastery. With two days left at the monastery, he shared his concerns with Brother Francis:

Tony: No, I am not going to give up my job. I am not going to sit in church all day and read the Bible. I need to live. I need to keep my lifestyle. So I'm just a little bit worried. Part of me wants to keep the whole thing alive and carry it through. And I know the minute I get out, it will fade.

Brother Francis: I want to give you something that I think will help with what you've just described .... Vocation is about discovering who you really are and maybe what you should really be doing. And that is what we are trying to do here—discover who we really are. I want to give you this stone, this white stone. We have our Christian name, our family name. But we also have another name, and it's called our “white stone name.” [Revelation 2:17] says, “Your new name is written on a white stone in heaven.” I think our vocation is to find out what that name is, to find our white stone name.

After handing Tony the stone, Brother Francis places his hand on his head and speaks a word of blessing over him. Immediately after that exchange, the camera scans to a shot of Tony, outside in the dark, huddled on a bench, deeply affected by Brother Francis' fatherly words of hope and blessing.

Sower comments: I believe Brother Francis ... speaks to the heart of the fatherless generation. These are the sons and daughters who don't know their true name. They are searching for who they really are. In their search, they bring this question of identity to anyone who will listen .... They are willing to look anywhere to find it. (John Sower, *Fatherless Generation* (Zondervan, 2010), pp. 116-117, 12-13)

Do you hear the cries of young people, yearning for fathers? Do you see what John Sower sees in movies? Do you read what John Sower reads

in blogs and in books? Do you hear the angst of young people on talk radio?

But Jesus brings us good news, and it is startling. Jesus' disciples would have all been about 15 years old, as that was the age at which a gifted young man would become a *talmid*, a disciple, of a rabbi. They would have left home to attach themselves to the rabbi. These twelve observed Jesus intensely, wanting to know what he knew, and to do what he did. And one day, they asked Jesus to teach them to pray.

So Jesus taught them, and we read the prayer in Luke 11, it is a familiar prayer, though Luke's version is shorter than the one in Matthew. However, the main point this morning is to see how Jesus addresses God. He addresses God as "Father".

Nowhere in any major, or even minor religion before Jesus did men and women dare address God as "Father"! God was addressed as God, Creator, Shepherd, Leader, Holy One, King, Sovereign, The Most High, Lord, the Lord of Hosts. But never in the Old Testament is God called "Father" in prayer.

And Jesus presses the issue even further. The word translated "Father" here is one adapted from the Aramaic word "Abba". "Abba" means "Daddy", or "Papa". It is a term that a young child would call their father. It is a term of great tenderness and affection. Jesus instructed his disciples to pray by addressing God as "Father", "Daddy", "Papa".

You know, it was a real thrill for me to watch Mark and Rachel grow up in their early years. I was a stay at home dad for more than three years. I loved watching them grow and encounter the world anew each day. I remember the day I was changing Mark's diaper and I was trying to make him laugh, and he did! I remember when Rachel said something like "Dada". I thought I had died and gone to heaven!

As I think back on those early days, I can hardly imagine the possibility of them calling me anything but "dad". I try to imagine Mark or Rachel waking up in the morning, padding out to the front room in their pajamas, wiping the sleepy tears from their eyes, and saying, "Reverend James E. Stochl, Jr. can I have some Cherrio's, please?" Or later in the day, "Pastor Stochl, sir, would you play Legos with me?" Or even later,

“Professor Stochl, would you go with me to ride my Big Wheel in the playground?” It just doesn’t sound right to me.

Yet, this might be how sounds sometimes to our Heavenly Father when we pray. There is a time and place for more formal prayers, and for thoughtful, respectful addresses to the Almighty, especially in public. But when we are alone, when we pray, Jesus said to address Almighty God, the One who created the heavens and the earth, the one who knows the names of each and every star in each and every galaxy, who knows the tops of the Himalayas and the depths of the Mariana Trench, Jesus told his followers to address this God as “Father”, “Abba”, “Daddy”.

Why do we have difficulty in addressing God as our “Daddy”? Well, that’s a long discussion, I think, longer than we can handle this morning. However, I think later in Luke 11 Jesus touches on it. Jesus argues an absurd situation to make a point. If a son came to a father and asked for fish, what human father would give the son a snake? And if a child asked their father for an egg, what father would give that child a scorpion? This doesn’t make sense even on a human level. It makes less sense on the divine level. Our Heavenly Father grants good gifts to His children.

And therein lies our tension. Many of us have prayed, sincerely, passionately, lovingly, with trust and devotion, and things have not gone our way. And we begin to wonder, don’t we, about the goodness of God, about the trustworthiness of our Heavenly Father.

I have recently had my own battles with this very thing. In January 2007, my younger brother had a stroke. It turned out to be a glioblastoma brain tumor. And he battled that tumor for almost three years, until September 2009, when he passed away.

I have never prayed so hard for anything in my life, as I did for my brother’s health and recovery. I begged God. I pleaded with God. I believed God would heal Dave. I offered my own life and health if only Dave would live. And when my brother died, part of my faith died as well. I felt like I had prayed for a fish, and gotten a snake. I felt like I had prayed for an egg, and gotten a scorpion.

So I found it harder and harder to pray, or even to see God as my “Father”, my “Abba”, my “Daddy.” I went through over a year of a dark night of the soul.

And yet, working through these issues with wise counselors and friends, and a grief recovery ministry called Griefshare, I have come through on the other side. God helped me through those times, I have no doubt. And my faith in Him has been restored, and I am beginning once again to delight in my Heavenly Father.

And here’s what I learned. God is my Father, and He sticks it out, no matter what.

When a child is hurt or injured, a father does not run away. A father stays, and brings comfort and strength. And part of that strength is received from knowing that the father is staying, that the father is going to see it through.

And so it is with God. When we, His children, go through difficulty, it is harder to see God as our Father. But He will stick it out with us. He wants to give us good gifts. He is not in the snake and scorpion giving business, he is in the fish and egg business for those who need food.

Who needs a father? We all do.

The challenge on this Father’s Day, for us men, is to be a good father to our children, or to the fatherless in our nation.

The challenge on this Father’s Day, for women, is to support men in being good, fatherly influences.

The challenge on this Father’s Day, for children, is to give thanks to your father, and honor him for being your father.

And the comfort for all of us on this Father’s Day is there is One Father who is with us and accessible in the darkest, longest nights, in the loneliest days, in the most distressing circumstances, in the midst of unbearable pain and suffering. And His Son came to invite us into a

relationship of love and trust, and to call him our “Father”, our “Abba”, our “Daddy”.