

Fathers, Faith, and Flourishing

Matthew 6:7-13
(Hymns – 813, 625, 324, 451)

Fathers help children flourish.

Out of love,
they do everything they can
to create the conditions and provide the support
for children to be protected as they mature
and to learn how to live life abundantly.

Fathers who strive to live according to these ideals,
who work hard to achieve these aspirations,
deserve to be honoured and respected.

We know the qualities of relationships
that help children flourish.
In writing to the Galatians,
Paul outlined them clearly.
He called them the fruits or gifts of the Spirit.
They are love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-discipline.

Fathers, and mothers,
anyone in a position of parenting at any point in a child's life,
would do well to post a list of these qualities
someplace where they could see them every morning
to remind them of the way to be with their children
and with everyone else's.

These qualities set a high standard for parenthood.
And I don't think it is impossible.
Indeed, those of who have been
grasped by God's grace in Jesus Christ
have been given all of these gifts
by the Father of our Lord.
Through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ,
we have become heirs with him to the riches of God's grace.

We are the grateful recipients of these graces.
We have been empowered by God's Holy Spirit
to use them to be a blessing to others and to ourselves.

If our parenting is lived out in gratitude for these graces,
then we will help our children flourish.

Let's take a closer look at what
this kind of fatherhood might mean
for our attitudes and behaviours as parents.

The best known passage on fathers in the Bible
is the Lord's Prayer.

Remember, if we are in Christ,
to be Christ's body in the world,
then we have been empowered to think and act like Christ.
We cannot achieve the salvation that he has achieved for us,
but we can follow his example,
live according to the way he modeled.

Indeed, disciples follow in the way of their teacher.
That is who we are as Christians – followers of Jesus Christ.

So, what does the Lord's Prayer tell us about fatherhood?

Three things stand out for me as I reflect on this question.

First, good fathers (and mothers)
acknowledge and worship the Father of Jesus Christ,
the God who has created, redeemed, and sustained the whole universe.
This God ensures that life flourishes through the influence of his Holy Spirit,
a Spirit that continues the work of Jesus Christ
in bringing into being God's kingdom of *shalom*,
a way of life guided by all the qualities Paul wrote of to the Galatians.

We "hallow" this God
in worship and learning, fellowship, and service.
At the centre of our lives as parents
is our faith in this God,
our loyalty to Jesus Christ,
and our reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us
into the ways of being beloved friends of God
building his kingdom with Him.
God's kingdom, featuring the same qualities of the good life
"on earth as in heaven,"
is a community of love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-discipline.

Second, our duties to our children
focus on provision and protection.
We are called to provide our children

with “daily bread,”
with everything they need in order to flourish.
We are to nourish their flourishing,
not only physically, but also emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.
This is God’s “daily bread” that feeds every dimension
of our human energy so we can be a blessing in God’s name.
This is the same “daily bread”
that nourishes us in the power to forgive,
to be patient, gentle, kind, and generous
as our children learn from their mistakes.
We are called to protect our children against evil
while they learn to do that for themselves.
Mistakes are not things to be condemned with punishment,
but opportunities to learn what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.
Teaching the faith by example and in conversation with our children
is the best way to provide and protect
in God’s name.

Third, we father well when we prayer well.
Living our own lives in constant companionship with God,
through the work of Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit,
will help us be good fathers and parents
one conversation after another.
Just as our relationship with God is deepened and enriched
one prayerful conversation after another,
so our relationships with our children is deepened and enriched
one loving conversation after another.

The world in which we parent is complicated and complex.
That can force us into parenting out of fear.
But we worship a God whose love casts our fear.
Fear was defeated by what God did for us in Jesus Christ.
We are now free to parent in love.

So, let’s use that freedom well.
Let’s model for and teach our children
the ways of love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-discipline.
There is not better way to honour our heavenly Father
and be good earthly fathers in his name.

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