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EPHESIANS 6:4

Ephesians: Recognizing Who You Are in Christ

I'd like you to open your Bibles with me to Ephesians 6. We're going verse by verse through the book of Ephesians. We started this book of Ephesians trying to understand who we are in Christ in the first three chapters and the last three chapters are putting it into practice. So in chapters 4, 5, and 6 we're learning more about what that means in practical terms. What does it look like for us to follow the Lord and to be the people that God has called us to be? We got into chapter 5 and we talked about wives and husbands, we talked about children last week, and now we come to fathers in verse 4.

We're going to take that one verse, verse 4, and talk about fathers, but then we're going to amplify that idea and we're going to talk about the fatherhood of God that applies to all of us. I think it's helpful for all of us to understand the role of fathers in general. So that's what we're going to talk about first. Then after we do that, we're going to talk about the fatherhood of God and what that looks like, which applies, of course, to all of us because we all have and can have God as our heavenly Father.

Ephesians 6:4 says this: *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

Some of the things we'll have to say today are for both dads and moms because we're talking about parenting kinds of things in some respect. But there's a special role of a father in a home, a special task that God has given to that man in that home to do that work in that family. So we'll zero in on that quite a bit today, looking at several passages of scripture that fill that out for us so that we know what that looks like.

You might not be a dad here, but I want you to listen to what we have to say about dads and what the Bible has to say about dads. That's going to lead you into maybe thinking about your own family but maybe also thinking about God as your Heavenly Father and what He wants to do with you. So it's a very special place that God has placed in each one of our hearts for a father and we're going to talk about what that looks like.

More and more dads today are getting on board. It used to be thirty, forty years ago that dads weren't even involved in, present at the birth of the child. Now we're seeing more and more that they're very involved. Dads are involved in the process of being involved with their family. Seventy-five percent of men today say that they would rather invest in their family if they could and pull back from business and those kinds of things. They're really interested. We're seeing

greater interest. I'm excited about that because as I teach parenting seminars around the country, we're seeing more and more men attending the seminars. It's a very important role that we do.

Now look at the passage there. The first duty or the first task or instruction to men is negative. We want to just look at it and see what it says. We're told not to *exasperate* our children. It's a caution or a warning to put us on guard to stirring up anger in our kids either deliberately or through carelessly provoking them in a particular way. I think Paul starts with a negative command because he knows that fathers may be tempted to abuse their authority in the home. We need to be careful as dads not to do that.

The word *exasperate* has the idea of frustrate to the point of a loss of hope, frustrate to the point of discouragement. The warning is calling us to be careful not to break the spirit of a child; that as we work with them (and we have to do the things that are mentioned above in verse 1-3 – we're teaching them obedience, we're teaching them honor) but we have to do that in a very careful way.

In Colossians 3:21 it says this: *Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.* The idea is that they will be exasperated. The idea of exasperation is "I give up." We don't want kids to give up. We want them to hang in there. We want them to be able to move forward.

That doesn't mean we don't put roadblocks in their way to challenge them. It doesn't mean that we don't set limits for them because we must do that in order to train them and move them forward. But it means that we want to do it in such a way that's driving them and not overly angering them or exasperating them in our relationship with them. The way we work with our children is strategic. We don't want to set up an antagonist relationship with children.

When Paul was writing to Timothy and talking to him about how to lead God's church, he said an interesting thing in 2 Timothy 2:23. He says to Timothy, *Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.*

I think that's great advice for the church. Anybody who's leading the church needs to be careful about arguments. You want to stay away from arguments because they create an animosity or a contrary relationship with someone. But I think it's also good advice for the earthly family as well. We need to be careful about arguments. Sometimes kids want to argue and so we, because we often as parents have greater resources at our disposal, we have greater powers, we have greater knowledge, we tend to enter into the argument in order to do so.

But Paul is warning here about those arguments because they often lead to quarrelling. And so it's wise often times for us to pull back and say, "Look, I'm not going to argue with you about this." Because the arguing ends up in the wrong place. There are times when kids become sinfully angry because they don't like the discipline or the training that's happening in their lives. We're not talking about that. We're talking about a guilt of a father that would be unnecessarily aggravating a child. We know that when dads do that to kids they're sinning and that often causes children to sin as well. We want to be careful about how we're relating.

This first part is talking about not what we're doing but how we're doing it. How do we treat those children that God has placed in our care?

Let me show you another verse, 1 Thessalonians 2:11, that talks about a description of dad. It gives us an idea of what dads should do and how they should do it. 1 Thessalonians 2:11 says, *we exhorted, comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own child.*

In other words, here's how a father is supposed to relate, this is what we've tried to do with you. We've tried to treat you in this particular way. Three words are mentioned there. One: I *exhorted*. The third one is *charged* (which we would typically associate with the male role in a home). But the middle one kind of surprised me because I associate it more with the female role in the home. It says *comforted*. Do you see that? *We exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you.*

I tend to think of comforting as going to the mom. The dad might sometimes say, "Quit your crying. You're acting like a baby. You're crying; go see your mom." But the passage is giving an indication that dads are to be comforters. Dads are the ones who are saying, "Come on over here, sit on my lap, let me help you." Interesting perspective as we're trying to understand what a dad is doing and what his tasks are.

Let me show you another quality, another verse that also I tend to attribute to the female side of the family but God puts it in the male role. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 it says, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion (that's what we'll come back to) and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*

The *Father of compassion*. I always pause when I see that verse because it just reminds me that I as a dad need to be compassionate. Compassion is more than just feeling the pain of someone; it's doing something about it. So it's one thing to empathize, to feel the pain of someone else. It's another to take initiative and do something about that and so that's what we're looking at here in this passage is just an illustration about God. He is the Father of compassion. Reminds me that I need to be a father characterized by compassion.

I know that mothers are often characterized by gentleness. Can dads be characterized by the same thing? It seems that that's what's being talked about in these verses, at least illustrating God for us so that we can understand what a father does. It's a beautiful picture for us to understand this idea that we need to be thoughtful of.

The verse we're looking at says *do not exasperate your children*. Maybe a little bit more of the comfort side, maybe a little bit more of the compassion side would enable us as we're working with our children to set firm boundaries, to call them to a high expectation, but not to exasperate them or create a problem for them.

The next word in our verse in Ephesians 6:4 is the word *instead*, which gives us the impression that there's a contrast going to be made here. Instead of exasperating them, let's do something

different. He goes into the first word *bring them up*. The word *bring them up* is the word ‘to provide nurture.’

Look back in your passage there to Ephesians 5:29. In 5:29 the relationship of Jesus to the church in a passage about husbands to wives and it says that no man hates his body, but he feeds. The word ‘feed’ is the same word ‘to bring up’ here, which gives us the impression that father has a job to do that is to nurture his children. But also if you take the previous version, it’s also to nurture his wife.

There’s a role that a husband and a dad has in the home of nurturing. Not just leading strongly, but there’s a sense of caring for them, nurturing them, sharing love and encouragement. That nourishment is often a spiritual nourishment or an emotional nourishment, not just a physical nourishment, intellectual nourishment. There’s a sense of a father being involved in the nourishment of what’s happening in his family.

So when it says *bring them up* we’re talking about some sense of nourishing those people or those children that are growing up in the home. The word *bring them up* is active; it has the idea of doing something, not just sitting back and waiting.

There are some people who have an idea about children that they’re more like a flower, that if you just let them grow and you give them enough sunshine that they’ll grow up to be a nice flower. That is not what God teaches in His word. It’s important to view children, I would suggest, more as a garden, a garden that needs to be tilled, that has weeds in there. If we’re working helping a child change the heart then we’re sensitive to those needs, sensitive to those weeds that are there so that we can help that child grow and develop.

In Proverbs 29:15 it says this: *a child left to himself brings shame to his mother*. If you just think, if you have an opinion about raising children, that our job is just to provide this nourishing environment and they’ll grow up to be godly, then there’s a problem. Because it’s going to take more intentional work in a child’s heart than just letting them go. We don’t just let them go in order to move them forward, we help them make some changes, we train them, and that’s where we’re going to come to in the next part of the verse in just a moment.

John MacArthur puts it this way. “What ruins most children is not what their parents do to them, but what they do not do for them.” What strikes me here is that we as parents are not just raising children, we are raising adults. They start as children and so we’re preparing them to be the people that God wants them to be.

As we go on in the passage, the next thing that Paul challenges us to do is to provide discipline or the next word in your passage might be ‘training.’ A very important passage for us to understand. Training is going to be a part of their job. We must understand what training is.

In Proverbs 22:6 it says *train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*. The idea is training. What does that training mean? Training is often intentional. It means looking at a child and saying, “The child is here and the child needs to get to this level over here. What kind of training are we going to do to help that person arrive at this mission?”

Tyler's just been in training with the army. I'm sure they had a goal for him to get up here and they saw "Oh, he's over here; we've got a lot of work to do with this guy, Tyler." And so they train him to get him to the place where he needs to be.

In many ways the home is the place where our children are trained, so we must ask this very important question: What is the goal for this child? If we're just looking at the day to day, getting things done, and we're not thinking about "where does God want this child to be" then we might miss some of the opportunities for training, we might miss the opportunities to see how the daily work of now contribute to the ongoing work that needs to take place in that child's life.

I read this quote this week about dads. "Dad, you are the point man in your home. You are the coach of your team. You are the captain and your barracks is boot camp for training young soldiers for the greatest combat in the world. Your residence is a launching pad for missiles of missionary zeal, aimed at the unreached peoples of the world."

Notice that the word 'training' is tied into a phrase there. It's training and instruction of the Lord. I would suggest that the most important job that we have with our children is not to get them into college or to get them into a good career. Our most important job is not to get them set financially. Our most important job is to train them spiritually because all of those other things will come as byproducts if the person has a heart for the Lord and can grow in their relationship with the Lord on their own. So we're trying to help them grow and then transfer that over to them so they're nurturing themselves spiritually.

How can we help a child grow spiritually and be the person that God wants them to be? Of all the New Testament, this is the key passage on parents training their children in the Lord. Who has the responsibility? Is it the school or the Christian school that has the responsibility to train our children? No. Is it the church that has the responsibility to train our children? That's not what it says. The primary responsibility for training our spiritual nurture in the home is in the home. It's the parents.

If we were to look at the Old Testament and find the key passage that talks about parents being the primary trainers of children, we would go to Deuteronomy 6:6-9. Let me read this to you again. *These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts* (which implies that we ourselves as parents need to be disciples of God and following Him). *Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.* Spiritual nurture takes place in the home. God designed it that way.

As you know, I like to say that spiritual nurture is like learning how to drive a car. You can take kids to church for the book-learning kind of thing, but the behind-the-wheel experience is at home when kids are learning how to drive the car spiritually. How do you handle emotions from a spiritual perspective? How do you handle an irritating boss or an unfair situation from a spiritual perspective? See, when we start doing those things and modeling them in the home, kids start to learn. How do we help our children experience the faith? It takes place in the home.

That's the behind-the-wheel experience. So that our kids can be working through this, so they can understand it.

It is our most important job as parents to understand that the goal is not only outward performance, behavior; that the goal is a changed heart. And when we equip our children spiritually to go forward, we're giving them a gift that will help them tremendously. So we want to bring them up in the discipline and the instruction of the Lord or the training and instruction of the Lord. I think the best way we can do this is by having engaging dialogue with our kids or engaging family times, spiritual times with them.

If you're looking for creativity to add to your devotions then I would encourage you to get some of the resources that we offer you. Often Ed Miller has a table out here at the back and it has those kind of resources on to energize your devotion experience. Because that devotional time is so important.

You can simplify your life. If you're in a family right now you know that simplifying is important. We get busy with all kinds of things. Taking kids here to there and all kinds of things that we do. But as you're simplifying, the one thing that you cannot take out of your schedule is the spiritual interaction that you have. Some of that is planned. Maybe only once a week you have a planned spiritual time then the spontaneous conversations you have along the way.

One of my favorite verses when it comes to parenting and fathering is Malachi 4:6 which talks about the end times, which we are in now. We are in the end times. That's why we're seeing this passage fulfilled. It says, *He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.*

The idea is that God in the end times is going to do something very special in the hearts of dads. He's going to turn their hearts to their kids. Instead of having them be so focused on (and I think easily focused on) achievement, success in the job market, dealing with finances, solving all the problems of the family, which is our typical tendency as leaders, that's what we want to do, God is saying that in the end times something very important is going to happen. That the hearts of the fathers are going to be turned to their children.

When that happens then it means those children are going to mean something more important to them than they might have otherwise, that their hearts, the way they make decisions, is going to incorporate kids in their lives. That's powerful. It's beautiful to see that taking place in the lives of many different people. It's a hard issue.

What we see here in these passages that we tried to look at today, that the role of a dad is very important in a home. If you're a single mom here, I just want you to know that it's a beautiful thing to see that God is the Father to the fatherless. God makes up a lot of the difference if you're in a single-parent home. But even as a single parent, often you're trying to take on the responsibilities of both the dad and the mom. Even if the child sees the dad at certain times, you're trying to accomplish some of those things. So understanding the significance of the dad in a family that can be really helpful for you as you're trying to move forward with your family as well.

One of the interesting things that God talks about is our earthly relationships and compares them to our relationship to Him. A passage that can lead us into this fatherhood of God idea is Matthew 7:11 which says, *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 good gifts to those who ask him!*

There's a contrast between an earthly father and a heavenly Father. I want to spend just a few minutes talking about that because God wants to do something big in your life in regards to your heavenly Father.

It can be disappointing when your expectations of success are dashed and you find yourself sleeping with the pigs. It can be humiliating if you find yourself eating out of the pig trough. But I think a lot of us are like the prodigal son who find ourselves with expectations that are not met. The world isn't as easy as I thought it was going to be. The success that I thought I was going to have isn't as easy to grasp as I thought. I don't have as many friends as I thought I would have.

As this prodigal son sits among the pigs he starts to think about life and think about what he wants to do next and he decides to go back home. He thinks about one person, his father. He thinks about going back to that father. He doesn't go back to that father as a son, he even wants to go back to that father as a servant or as a slave in that home. He knows there's something back there. I'm convinced that all of us as we experience our lives come to a place like that.

We often to refer to the prodigal as someone who starts well but then leaves the faith and discovers they want to come back. But let's not look at it that way for the moment.

Let's just look at it in each one of our hearts. When we start looking and investing ourselves in things that aren't God, but that we're investing ourselves in dreams or other things that we have. We try to go after those dreams, we try to find those things, and we see in the midst of that that life isn't as easy as we thought. There's a problem somewhere along the line and we realize we cannot find what we need in the midst of that. We need something else. We need to go back to the Father.

The whole picture is really a picture of salvation and how God wants to embrace us in a very personal way. But I think it's a picture also of how God wants to work in each one of our hearts and we tend to drift in our minds. Even as believers we drift in our minds to other things and we start thinking those things are going to fill the father vacuum that God has placed in our hearts. See, God designed us in a specific way. He designed us with a hole in our heart that can only be filled by the Father.

God gives us earthly relationships like mates and children and spouses and parents to help us experience intimate relationships and to get to know each other in those very personal ways and then to get to know ourselves. But whenever we start relying on even those relationships we end up short because there's no human person that can ultimately satisfy the hole that's inside. No human person. So God wants to do something deeper inside of us and that's that father relationship today.

I want you to see three things about the fatherhood of God today. Number one: I want you to see that God as your Father can meet all of your intimate needs. Number two: I want you to feel an openness to God and have a satisfaction of being His child. And number three: I want you to live with the daily realization that you now have the benefits of having the Father in your life. On a daily basis you can come before your heavenly Father and understand Him even more.

You may, even in the course of our time together this morning start to reevaluate some of your relationship with your earthly parents. You may come to a place where you release them from some of the expectations that you may have placed on them that should not be placed on them. You may be thinking of some things that you wish your parents would have done and because they didn't do that, it has caused you to be a certain way. So it's frustrating for you, it's hard for you in the midst of that.

But the reality is, God has given all of us imperfect parents. All of our parents are imperfect and I think God has done that in part so that we will be drawn to the heavenly Father. So that we'll say, "I need something more as a father than the one I have now. I need something more than the mother than I have right now." Parents, the best thing we could do is introduce our children to the heavenly Father so that God has a personal relationship with them.

When you do that, when you have the opportunity to release your parents because they are human, damaged people by sin, when you can release them from their foolishness that they may have caused you as you were growing up, when you can release that you are in a better place to bless them and to turn around and offer them the blessing that you would like to give to them. Something that's powerful that they can receive.

Let me show you a passage of scripture that really describes this fatherhood of God in more detail and gives us a beautiful understanding of these things that I'm trying to communicate today. In Galatians 3:26 on to verse 4:7 it says this: *So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is slave although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. There's a special Abba relationship with our heavenly Father that we enjoy.

I was on a plane recently and there was a Jewish family and the little boy was saying, "Abba, Abba." Now that's not a normal part of my vocabulary. The only Abba I know is in the Bible.

But when I saw the relationship that the little boy had with his dad, calling out to him, “Abba, Abba,” then I realized and I knew it was just a picture of what God wants to do in my life, how we want me to be able to view Him.

The term ‘father’ in reference to God is only used eighteen times in the Old Testament. Because in the Old Testament we have this picture of God as God is El-Shaddai, Jehovah-Jireh, Almighty, God is powerful and we need to respect Him. And that picture of God is a very important one we have in the Old Testament.

But in the New Testament the word ‘father’ is used to refer to God hundreds of times. In fact, over a hundred times in the gospel of John alone. God uses that picture because that’s the primary way in the New Testament He wants us to understand Him as the Father. That we’re getting to know God in a very personal way where He’s the God, the Father of compassion, the God of all comfort. That we’re relying on Him as the one who’s directing us or guiding us or right there with us. He’s the one in charge, He’s in control.

When we understand God as Father it helps us see that we’re heirs (as the passage says) and we’re given rights. We have certain rights. One of them is in John 1:12 where it says, *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* The right to become children of God.

I have a new friend that I’m making. He’s with the Family Policy Council in Iowa. His name is Chuck Hurley. He has ten kids, so he’s fascinating to me just because of his family. But we’ve been dialoguing together about some things we might do in Iowa for the population there.

I just imagine a family like Chuck’s with ten kids. Imagine that they go to the carnival and dad goes to the counter and he gets all the tickets. He has to get half a roll of tickets for all of his family. He says, “Line up, kids. I’m going to hand out tickets here.” So they line up and he starts handing out tickets to everybody so everybody has their tickets to go on the rides. He starts handing them out and everybody gets them and all of a sudden this kid comes. It’s not one of his, but saw everyone lining up for tickets so he gets in line. So dad’s looking at him saying, “Who are you?”

I think that sometimes when we come before the Father we come just like that little boy who has no right to come before the father. He comes before the father and says, “Can I have some tickets?” We view ourselves saying, “I don’t belong in this line. What am I doing here?”

But here’s what happens. One of the children of the dad comes and says, “Hey, dad, this guy’s with me. Can you give him some tickets?” And the dad says, “Oh, he’s with you? Sure. We’ll give him some tickets.” And that’s what the Holy Spirit does. When Jesus Christ died for us on the cross He adopts us into the family and says, “You want some tickets? I’ve got a lot for you.” And God delights in passing on the benefits that we do not deserve because we do not have the rights except for the fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross for us and Jesus says, “He’s with me. Dad, he’s with me.” So we’re now able to receive the benefits of being a child of God and enjoying the benefits that come with that.

If you think just a moment about your family and your parents as you were growing up, did your parents understand you? Did they know how best to care for you, lead you, to discipline you, to train you? Even if you had great parents like I did, they often missed some of the important needs that we have inside.

Some people say, “I wish my dad would have...” and you can fill in the blank. “I wish my dad would have been there more often for me.” “I wish he would’ve attended more games of mine.” “I wish my mom would’ve...” and you can fill in the blank. “I wish she would have listened to me more.” “I wish she would’ve involved me more in the things that are going on.”

You can write whatever you want in the midst of that. But when we start holding on to those expectations, we rob, I think, God of some of the duties that He has in our lives. And when we release some of those expectations, there’s a tremendous freedom inside.

There are a lot of people who go do counseling for a lot of time trying to undo some of the things they think their parents have done to them. I’m not saying that’s bad. I think counseling is a valuable thing. However, I think many times what we need to do in our lives is release that so that we can transfer it over to God as our heavenly Father and then begin to watch Him work, watch Him do the deeper work inside of our hearts that He wants to do.

In Matthew 6:32-34 it says this: *For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Notice, *the heavenly Father knows that you need them.* God knows you and me. He cares about us. It is hard for us to take the risks in life sometimes. The risk of loving someone again that has hurt us, or someone else because of the hurt we’ve experienced in the past. It’s a risk to get out there and to find a job. It is a risk to get out there and admit that we’re wrong.

There are risks involved in life, but God knows who we are. He cares about us. He’s right there to nurture us, to be the person that we need in order to support us and care for us and love us. Because He knows us. He knows every thought that we have, He knows every part of our heart, He knows everything about us, and He wants to grow us in some very special ways.

When I look at the Old Testament, the story of the Israelites as they were traveling toward the Promised Land, they get to the Promised Land and they’re ready to go in under the leadership of Moses. And they fail. They see the giants in the land and they say to themselves, “We can’t do this.” So what happens? They have to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

There are some people who view the wandering that takes place during that forty year period of time as a punishment. A punishment that says, “Because you didn’t go in you are punished for forty years because you weren’t able to do that. One year for every day the spies spent in the land of Israel you’re punished for that.” But see, that’s not how God was working in the Israelites and that’s not how God works in our lives.

There's a difference between punishment and discipline. Punishment is negative. Discipline is positive. Punishment is focused on justice, balancing the scales. You did this, so you get that. Discipline is motivated out of love. The word 'discipline' means to teach. The word 'punishment' has more to do with revenge or a justice mentality. Though punishment focuses on past misdeeds, discipline focuses on future deeds. There's a difference between discipline and punishment. And the word in our passage today in Ephesians 6:4 is the word 'discipline.'

When God said to those people, "You can't go into the wilderness now," He did that in a way to discipline them because they didn't understand who He was. They were not able to trust Him fully. They weren't able to follow Him like they needed to do. It took risks for them to be able to go in and they weren't ready for the risks. So God said, "Okay. Forty years I'm going to teach you how to follow me. I'm going to show you how you can trust me. And when you trust me over the next forty years you are then going to be able to go in to the Promised Land."

And so every day of that forty years He led them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Every day except Saturday they would get up and they could find manna on the ground that they would eat. God provided for them every day. He took care of them. When they met challenges, He helped them solve those challenges. God disciplined them when they grumbled. So many things that God did in that forty years that were preparing them to go back across into the Promised Land to be the people that God wanted them to be and to take the privileges that existed in that Promised Land.

Do you know the Bible says when they were in the wilderness that their sandals didn't wear out? What a miracle that for the forty years their sandals didn't wear out. That would be great to have shoes that didn't wear out. Forty years God was teaching them. "You can rely on me. I will take care of you every day for forty years."

So the next time they came to the bank of the Jordan River and God said, "Cross over," they said, "Let's go. We're ready." Because God will help us conquer the people in the land. God will help us to take over that Jericho. They didn't know it yet, but they were going to see the walls fall down. And God is going to give them the victory.

See, sometimes God takes us through the challenges that we experience right now for what's yet to come. I don't know what's going on in your life. Life can be really tough at times, but God does work in our hearts to prepare us for the next thing. God does work in our hearts to reveal who He is. And one of the greatest things that God wants to reveal to any of us is that He is our Father.

I would hope that as you get up each day this week you will be able to say to the Lord, "God, you're my Father. Guide me through today. Lead me through this day so that I can trust you more." Because God knows you. He knows your thoughts. He knows your name. He knows everything about you. And that's such a beautiful thing to be able to trust Him in that way.

When we focus on God as Father it frees us in our hearts from so much because a father is so important in the life of a child. God wants us now to take that picture of the heavenly Father so

that He can do the deeper healing inside of our lives and provide us for what we really need on the inside. He knows us in a very personal way.

Let's sing that song together in just a moment, "He Knows My Name." But let's pray before we do.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, thank you for the privilege of being part of your family. Not just a family in a church, in a group environment, but we know, Lord, that you desire and want to be with each one of us alone in private, that you delight in each one of us as an only child, that it's as if we were just you and me together and that you have a special plan and you're trying to help me to move along in my life to make the decision that you want me to do. You want to grow me up in my relationship with you and with others. Lord, we know that you provided us with so much grace and we just need to receive that. So today we thank you that you are our Abba Father. We thank you that you have met our needs. Lord, we ask that you would give us the ability to trust you today and tomorrow and the next day each one of us. In Jesus' name, amen.