

Christ Community Covenant Church
“A Perfect Father” – Ephesians 5:1-2
Pastor Gloria Merritt - June 18, 2017

That (opening) song is a perfect segue to the message today. The lyrics are healing and powerful. And, thank you Josh for sharing so tenderly with us. I'm confident that God has used your story today.

I can honestly tell you that some of the most wonderful moments of my life have been to see my husband be a dad and now be a grandparent, a Papa, and then to see my son and son-in-law be dads. To me, it's such a God-glorifying thing – a picture of God's heart towards us. So, it's a special honor to get to share a message with you this morning. I'm also grateful for RightNow Media. If you don't know what that is and how you can be using it, please ask someone about it. Some teaching videos on Right Now Media really helped to shape my message today, and much of the influence came from a pastor named Louie Giglio from Atlanta, Georgia.

Ephesians 5:1-2 ¹ be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and ² live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

May the Lord bless the reading of His Word and may He bless these next few minutes of our time together. Please pray with me, “Heavenly Father, we honor and bless you today, the one who is Father to the fatherless, and defender of the widows. May you, Lord, meet us here today, allowing us to soak in the Truth of who you are. Through Jesus, I pray, amen.”

Let me ask you something. What is the most important thing about you? What is the most important thing about you? If you've been attending this church [Christ Community Covenant Church] for any length of time, you might know that we've asked this question before and that we've offered a good answer for it. We like what A.W. Tozer said. He said, “The most important thing about you is what you believe about God.” Think about that for a moment. Note that it doesn't say, “The most important thing about you is that you believe in God.” No, it says, “The most important thing about you is **WHAT** you believe about God.”

“The most important thing about you is what you believe about God.” ~ A.W. Tozer

This is very appropriate for us to think about on this Father's Day. After all, on Father's Day and Mother's Day we tend to size things up about ourselves and we size things up about our parents. We view much of life through the lens of whether we appreciate a parent's efforts or whether we are terribly disappointed or even hurt about their efforts. And, for most of us, what we believe about God is impacted by our parents' efforts. And, what we believe about God impacts every single thing we do. It's what we call our worldview and recently Dave talked about that. While many people in our culture consider themselves to be Christians, actually only a small portion of those “Christians” have a Biblical, Christ-centered worldview – a worldview that practices the Lordship of Jesus Christ in everything they do – in their finances, in their business dealings, in the way they use their time, in their parenting, in their media choices and educational philosophies.

How many of you have seen the movie “The Shack”? I had read the book back when it came out, and have to admit that I didn't like it all that much. I was hesitant to go to the movie, but I kept running into people who had seen it and really urged me to go. So I did. And then, my husband and I watched it last weekend. First of all, it's fiction. It's a story. It's a story of one man's experience of how God, who had been affectionately named “Papa”, had reached out to heal the terrible, terrible hurt of this one man. The main character had experienced a very cruel father in childhood and after becoming a parent himself, he experienced a very cruel crime, the abduction and murder of his daughter. We can identify with this character and rejoice that his heavenly father is so kind and loving. There's a line in the movie that I love. The character, Mack, says to Papa, “why did I have to meet you at the Shack?” [the Shack is where the crime took place] Papa answered, “because, that's where you got stuck.”

Here's a true statement: God is not a larger version of our earthly father (or mother). And, yet, for better or worse, we are often stuck in the place of approaching God completely on human terms as though he is. Here's another true statement: God is the PERFECT version of our earthly father! And that, my friends is incredibly good news.

Two weeks ago we had a family reunion at our house with Gary's extended family. Gary is one of 7 siblings, and this was the first time that we gathered together outside of one of the memorial services of his parents. It was really fun to get together, to meet some new members of the family, little great nieces and nephews, and to overall, catch-up. Of course, the kids had really changed, but the adults hadn't aged at all. At least, that was our fantasy. But, it was one of those times when we'd say, "oh my goodness, you've changed SO much! [Who do I look like?] You look just like your mom, or just like you dad! Well, for one of my nieces, that wasn't exactly what she wanted to hear! I'm pretty sure she has been looking for ways to NOT look like her mom. But isn't that really the most natural thing? I mean, for you guys, maybe you read Men's Health or GQ magazine, and I don't know what else....and wouldn't it be weird if someone came up to you and said, "wow, you are looking so much like Ryan Reynolds or Duane Johnson, or the Arnold..." (and I had to do an internet search to find out who is considered buff these days!) Instead of saying, "wow, you remind me of your dad!" Or ladies, there comes that day when to our horror, we look in the mirror and see....our moms! Yes, thank you Mom for my thighs! And, there's no doubt that many of you can say, "I love it when someone says I look like my mom or my dad." But, let's be honest, because of the truth that our parents are human beings with a sinful nature, more than likely, they messed up something, and there are things about them that we'd rather avoid, or even RUN from! And, you know what? God knows. So, he inspired Paul to write, "Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children." Children imitate their parents. And God says, YOU are DEARLY LOVED children. Imitate me.

Let's take a moment and look back at **chapter 4 of Ephesians**, because verse 1 in chapter 5 has a "therefore" which means we have to reach back and understand the impact of what was just said. Turn in your Bibles to chapter 4 and we'll begin with verse 20. "You however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

You were taught to put off your old self. Taught to **put off** your old self. You know, a lot of us are getting older, but we're not necessarily getting better. That old guy is still hanging around and we have gotten pretty comfortable and tolerant of his ways. In fact, sometimes with aging, we give ourselves permission to slip back into some pretty childish behavior and it seems we return to the OLD stuff of our sin nature. Almost like becoming rebellious kids, toddlers who want their own way. And, if we're able to, we almost RUN towards it. **Friends, every day is a new opportunity to imitate our heavenly Father, to become new in Him.** There's a process that involves our mind. You have to be a good thinker in order to be a good follower of Christ.

Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Put off the old way of life. Put on a new attitude of your mind. Put on a new self. One way that God has given us to do that is to constantly bathe ourselves in His word. To soak ourselves in his Truth. We can't expect to put off the old without the renewing of our minds in His word.

We have the phenomenal opportunity to grow up to be like our heavenly Father. We are his dearly loved kids who grow up and actually look and act like their father. The goal is not that we would stagnate at some level of spirituality, but that we would continue to grow and mature. Honestly ask yourself, "have I stagnated? Have I gotten STUCK somewhere in my growth? Do I just show up here on Sunday mornings

and go through the motions? Can anyone see some type of change in me in the last 6 months? In the last year? In the last 5 years? Am I continually seeking to spend time with my heavenly Father in his word so that I am reflecting him?

We need to compare it to the growth we see in nature. Every year the seasons come and go. Things die and go fallow. But, the green comes, flowers bloom, fruit develops. How much fruit do people see in our lives? There needs to be evidence of growth.

Be an imitator of God. Think like God. Talk like God. Act like God. Respond the way God would respond. Care like God would care. Invest like God would invest. Be like God in any given moment. That's the goal for your life. Now, either God is diabolical and knows we can't do this, laughing in heaven the entire time, or God knows something about us and the power of the Holy Spirit within us and He believes we can become imitators of God! The gospel is that powerful! I guarantee that's what God is thinking.

Here's another favorite scripture of mine that speaks of God's provision to us for growth. **2 Peter 1:3-10**
³ His (the Lord's) divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

The potential of that scripture is powerful. The potential of that is teenagers, and college students, single folks, parents, and grandparents can become reflections of the Living God who participate in His divine nature everywhere in the world. We can be active, maturing believers who display the most beautiful fruit to a hungry and broken world.

A startling bit of research conducted by the Christian Business Men's Committee found the following: When the father in a family is an active believer, there is about a 75% likelihood that the children will also become active believers. But if only the mother is a believer, this likelihood is dramatically reduced to 15%. Wow. That's profound. Dads, do you realize the incredible impact you have on your children?

Listen to what John Piper says about the influence of parents: "The most fundamental task of a mother and father is to show God to the children. Children know their parents before they know God. This is a huge responsibility and should cause every parent to be desperate for God-like transformation. (For example) Children are absorbing from dad his strength and leadership and protection and justice and love; and they are absorbing from mom her care and nurture and warmth and intimacy and justice and love—and, of course, all these overlap. —John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 143-144.

On a lighter note, this morning we have another 4Cs dad who is going to share a few things with us on his perspective of fatherhood. It's Kyle Quackenbush. **[GO TO VIDEO]**

Kyle had some wonderful things to share with us this morning. And, you may have noticed that Kyle's words centered on the Lord Jesus and His influence in their home.

In preparation for today's message, I've been collecting some statements about being a good father that I thought I'd share with you today. A number of the statements came from a conference that I attended out in California called THRIVE. But I'm going to refrain. The reason is that I want to encourage you to become students of the Lord himself. He's already given you everything you need to live a godly life just by knowing Him! As it says in verse 2, "live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

If you want to be like your heavenly Father, you need to hang out with him. BE a blessing and GIVE a blessing.

- Do your kids a favor and love your wife, even if she's your EX (treat her with respect and kindness).
- Ask others if your values are "showing" and if how you spend your time reflects what you say you value.
- Integrity – do you have it? Who are you in the secret places?
- Admit when you're wrong. Offer apologies where necessary.
- KNOW your kids – what they like, what makes them tick, what's in their hearts (it takes TIME) - enter their world.
- Never laugh at your wife's choices – You're one of them!
- Jesus coped with temptation because HE HAD BEEN WITH HIS FATHER.
- You can think the right thoughts when you're in the right place.
- Have conversations, not arguments, because in arguments, there's a winner and a loser.
- It's almost impossible to live the right life with the wrong friends.
- What in your life needs to go?
- God must become our first call, not our last resort.
- Keep on loving your kids – don't give up on them.
- There's a big difference between being shot at and loved on.
- Be generous in your thinking about others and yourself.
- Expect setbacks.
- Guard your heart
- Guard your marriage.
- Values = how you spend your time, your energy, your effort, your money.

Benediction:

In light of this, every dad should ask himself, 'Do my children *know* how much I love them? Do they sense deep in their souls, both from words I have spoken to them and also from the time and attention I give them, that I love them? Do they know that, along with my insistence on their respect and obedience, my heart also longs deeply for them to have the very best that I can give them as their dad?'

Fathers can learn much about being human fathers simply by paying close attention to how God, our heavenly Father, fathers us. We can learn what true fatherhood is, then, by looking at *the* Perfect Father over all.