

ISAIAH 9 EVERLASTING FATHER

“Father.” What comes first to your heart and mind, when I say that word?

Maybe fear - for you were always afraid of what your father would say or do. Maybe disgust - for you reject much of what your father said and did. Maybe confusion - for you never knew what to make of your father. Maybe anger - for he hurt you greatly.

Maybe warmth - for he loved you wisely and well. Maybe nostalgia - for you have so many fond memories with him. Maybe joy - for you were blessed richly through him. Maybe thankfulness - for your father was a gift that you know others did not have.

During the Advent season, we are walking through the four names for the child God promises in Isaiah 9. We believe this child is Jesus. Today we ponder the title, “Everlasting Father.”

As you hear that, you may ask, how can Jesus the Son be the “Father”? As we discover in the New Testament, God the Father and God the Son are perfect in unity and one in purpose. So we can say that God the Father and Jesus the Son have the same relationship with God’s people. Jesus joins with the Father in being a “Father” to those he calls his sons and daughters.

No matter what enters your heart and mind when you hear the word “father,” Isaiah’s words invite you to discover the grace and love of this one we call Everlasting Father. Let’s find out how we get this relationship, and what we gain from this relationship.

HOW DO WE GET THIS? How do we receive the privilege of living in relationship with this one we call “Everlasting Father”?

It all begins with *GOD’S CALLING GRACE*. Isaiah knows this, because Isaiah knows the history of the Israelites. In the book of Genesis, God calls Abraham out of a land where he does not know the true God, and he leads him to become the “father” of people who will trust and follow the true God. Abraham does not call out for God. God calls Abraham, and God guides Abraham into this relationship.

God called then, and God calls now. Paul writes to the Ephesians, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...”

God starts the process. Just as a child does not choose to be born, we do not choose to enter a relationship with this One we call Everlasting Father. He initiates the relationship. He calls by his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace, we may answer the call and enter this relationship.

This is good news! Have you ever been in a relationship with someone, and you felt it was all one-sided - on your side? Maybe it was a dating relationship, or a friendship, or a church relationship, or even a relationship with a father or mother. You sensed that your love for that person was much greater than that person’s love for you.

But because we know of God’s calling grace, we never have to worry about that with him. This call is secure, because God has made the call. He will not take it back. According to his pleasure and will, he has chosen you, child of God in Jesus, to be his own. You will never love him more than he loves you. He loves you first, best and always.

How do we get this? God’s calling grace, and *GOD’S FORGIVING GRACE*. Isaiah knows this too, because he knows how God has revealed himself in Exodus. As God brings his law to his people, he describes himself this way: “...the compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.” This is God’s forgiving grace!

But there is one more phrase in that section. “Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.” How can this be? How can God forgive and punish? How can God do justice and show mercy?

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he explains this. In chapter 3, Paul describes how God sent his Son to be

a “sacrifice of atonement.” On the cross, Jesus received God’s punishment for the sins of God’s people. If I have genuine faith in Jesus, I know that on the cross, Jesus received God’s penalty for my sin. Since the price is paid for my sin, I am forgiven for my sin. God is just - he brings justice for sin. But he is also the Justifier - he gives his Son to receive that justice for those who trust in him to secure the forgiveness they need.

I am reminded of a story I read several years ago about a physically disabled couple that was ordered to court in Virginia. They needed 250 dollars, or they would be evicted from their apartment. The judge looked at them, excused himself, then returned to the courtroom with 250 dollars in his hand. He gave it to the lawyer for the landlord and said, “Consider it paid.”

This is good news, because deep in our hearts, we know we are sinners. We know we are rebels. We know we have not lived wisely or well before a great and good God. We need God’s forgiving grace. In Jesus, we have God’s forgiving grace. The price is paid! You don’t need to try to pay it yourself! God’s forgiving grace is enough!

How do we get this relationship? There is God’s calling grace, God’s forgiving grace, and *GOD’S ADOPTING GRACE*. Isaiah wrote soon after Hosea. We read in Hosea 11, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” We don’t see this language of adoption often in the Old Testament, but it is there. God’s people were his sons and daughters.

We read about adoption more in the New Testament. Further along in the book of Romans, Paul writes, “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’” Through faith in Jesus, God’s people need no longer fear God. We have a spirit of being sons and daughters. We cry out to God as our Father, for he has adopted us as his own.

This is good news, because we know God does not just forgive us and hold us at a distance. Sadly, how often I have done this with my own children! They sin, and I give a grudging word of forgiveness, and I sin by failing to embrace them fully. God is a far better father than me! He embraces us as his forgiven, adopted children.

Then he makes sure it stays that way, for we get this relationship not just because of God’s calling grace, God’s forgiving grace, and God’s adopting grace. We get (and get to keep) this relationship because of *GOD’S ENDURING GRACE*.

This title is Everlasting Father. When something is everlasting, it is without beginning and without end. If this plan existed before what we call history, we know it will last beyond what we call history. If God chose his people before what we describe as the “beginning of time,” we know God will endure in loving his people beyond what we describe as “the end of time.”

Still in the book of Romans, Paul’s words explode with this. At the end of chapter 8, he declares, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” Think of how much longer the list could be. Shall guilt or shame or regret or failure or discouragement or frustration or disappointment separate us from the love of Christ? No, for God’s grace is an enduring grace.

This is good news, because in this world, we still sin. We need to be reminded of his calling, forgiving, adopting grace. It endures through the sin we commit and the suffering we face.

A man once told the story of developing pictures in a dark room. Sometimes he used colored filters over his lenses, and he wrote of looking at a red dot on white paper through a red filter. He was amazed to find that when he looked at the red dot through the red filter, it appeared white. When God looks at us through the filter of the sacrifice of his Son, he sees us not as red with sin, but as white with purity.

Do you believe that in Jesus Christ right now, you are powerfully called, fully forgiven, truly adopted, and in the enduring embrace of the grace of God?

If you have never known this grace, may it be yours today. Follow his call. Receive his forgiveness. Delight in his adoption. Know that he will be faithful to endure forever.

But maybe you have known this grace, but your sin and suffering have put a filter before you that

clouds your vision of this grace. See it anew. You can relate to God as your Everlasting Father, because his grace is sufficient and abundant. It is not about what you have done for God. It is about what God has done for you. Never forget that. Always remember it. As you see your sin or sense your suffering, rest and rejoice in the God who gives his calling, forgiving, adopting, enduring grace.

We have learned how we get this relationship. Now let's ask, **WHAT DO WE GAIN FROM THIS?** What are the benefits of living with this One we call "Everlasting Father"? To start with, we gain *HIS LOVING CARE*.

The writer of Psalm 103 declares, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed; he remembers that we are dust." A good father has compassion on his children. He "feels" for his children. His heart is for them, and his heart is moved by them.

In Peter's first letter, as he writes to Christians who are suffering for their faith, he encourages them with these words: "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you." The Father loves his sons and daughters. He has a deep and abiding care for them.

This is good news, because we know that while people are fickle, and while people fail, God's care is never fickle, and it will never fail. Believer in Jesus, I mean you. You may agree with what I say, but you may not always sense this in your life. Maybe you are lonely - even with people around you. Maybe you are sad - the kind of dense, heavy gloom that does not easily pass. Maybe you are hurt - for you have loved and lost. Maybe you are confused - and you wonder if there is anyone to help. "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him...Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you."

He is the Everlasting Father, so we gain his loving care, and *HIS LOVING SUPPLY*.

Once again, we know Isaiah knows his history. In Exodus 16, right after God has brought his people out of Egypt, they begin to grumble, because they are worried about food. God says, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you." So he does - for every day they are in the desert.

Jesus knows this story, and maybe he is thinking of it when he tells his listeners in Matthew 6 not to worry. Why? Because there is nothing to worry about? No - you do not worry because your Heavenly Father knows what you need. You are more valuable than the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. If God supplies them, he will supply you.

Charles Colson tells the story of going to the hospital and waiting for the results of a biopsy. He talked with a nurse who knew of the calling, forgiving, adopting, enduring grace of God - and also knew she had lost everything in the recent economic meltdown. He marveled as he heard her say, "It's been tough, but I have no fear. The Lord has a plan for me. I am totally at peace."

This is good news, because while God never promises prosperity for everyone, he promises supply for his sons and daughters. You can be confident that while God may not give you everything you want, he will lovingly supply everything you need. Only you and God may know the details of your situation right now. Maybe you are struggling, because you have made foolish decisions, and maybe you need to confess that to him. Or maybe you have done nothing wrong, but everything is going wrong. Trust him to be the Father who will supply your needs.

We gain his loving care, his loving supply, and *HIS LOVING PROTECTION*.

The Psalms are full of cries for protection. Often these are cries for physical protection from the enemies of God's people. In Psalm 20, David pleads for this protection, then declares his faith: "Some trust in chariots and some trust in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." Translation: I will not trust what people can do for me, but in God.

This theme of protection runs through the New Testament, as well. There it is not so much a cry for physical protection, although early believers would have sought that in a time of great persecution. This is often a cry for spiritual protection. In the last chapter of the book of Ephesians, Paul urges his readers to put

on the “full armor of God,” because he knows they will face spiritual attack from Satan and his friends. This armor is all about the truths of God’s grace, which protect us in times of spiritual struggle.

This is good news, because while we know the danger of this world, we must also know the danger of spiritual assault. The Everlasting Father, and the gospel truths he has revealed, protect us. How are you feeling the attack of sin, suffering and Satan today? In relationship with the Everlasting Father, you are safe - now and forever.

In relationship with our Everlasting Father, we also gain *HIS LOVING DISCIPLINE*.

Later in Isaiah, the prophet declares how the Spirit of the Lord is upon him to preach. He will offer good news for the poor, help for the brokenhearted, and comfort for the mourning. All of this has a purpose: “They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.” We are God’s children, so we may display the splendor of our Father.

That is why, in the book of Hebrews, we read about God’s fatherly discipline. “Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Charles Spurgeon once wrote that when he thought God was a tyrant, he cared little about his sin. But when he came to know God as his Father, it broke his heart to sin against the One who had loved him so well.

This is good news, because we know even the hardest times are for our good, so that we might display his glory. We know that whatever he brings to us, he will produce righteousness in us, and that will lead to peace for us. Sin brings thunderstorms to the conscience. Righteousness brings peace to the heart. Our Father lovingly guides us to this, as he disciplines us.

How might he be doing this today? What sin is obvious to you? What suffering is oppressive to you? How might God be lovingly disciplining you? How might your Father be turning your heart and life toward the righteousness that produces peace?

God’s calling grace. God’s forgiving grace. God’s adopting grace. God’s enduring grace. God’s loving care. God’s loving supply. God’s loving protection. God’s loving discipline. Do you feel the weight of all this grace and love?

It is overwhelming, and I want it to overwhelm you! Our human fathers are a huge influence on us. But no matter what comes to your heart or mind when I mention your human father, my hope and prayer is that you will enter this Christmas season with a strong sense of the overwhelming grace and love of this One we call Everlasting Father. It is all that I have described, and so much more!

Christian author J.I. Packer has written that this truth of adoption is the “highest privilege” of our Christian faith, and that it is only when we understand and embrace this truth, that we genuinely understand Christianity at all. Do you? Do I? Do we? Are you living in the joy of the grace and love of the One who is the Everlasting Father?

The story is told of Irish clergyman, who saw a poor, humble man kneeling and praying beside the road. The minister said to the man, “You must be very close to God.” The man said, “Yes, he’s very fond of me.”

Believer in Jesus Christ, he’s very fond of you, for you are his child. It is not because of your goodness, but because of his grace. It is not because you love him well, but because he loves you well. He is the Everlasting Father, and he is very fond of you.