

## **The Standard: A Good Father**

January 21, 2018

Are you excited to be at church this morning? I hope so.

Welcome to City Church. If you're new my name is Justin. I'm the lead pastor here. God bless you. City Church is one church in five different locations and so right now we're streaming live to a number of our locations. So can we just say hello to Middletown and Hartford, all of our locations. Come on put your hands together. Say hi. Good morning church. All across the state of Connecticut. God bless you. We love you. It's amazing what we can do just with the gifts of technology today. And so it's just exciting stuff and we got a few more we're planning. Many of you know we're praying and planning about a Springfield and a Stamford launch in September and so please be praying about that if you want to be a part of those launches. No matter what location you're at, let some of the leaders know and we'd love to get you in the loop on what's going on for those. So it's an exciting time. You can turn the person next to you and say, "You came on a good Sunday." "You came on a really good Sunday."

I do want to give a little shout out to this men's retreat in February. Please be a part of this. Of course, if you're a man. We would love to have you be a part of this. Me and a number of the other leaders will be there and we're just so excited about what's going to happen in these few days — the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of February. So please make sure that you're a part of that. You can sign up at all of our locations. Last week was Martin Luther King Day on Monday and so we took some time just to talk about diversity and racism as a church. Very important subject for our community, for our church. So if you missed that please jump on the website, watch the video or listen to the podcast. And this is important stuff for where our family is going as a church and it's important for you to be a part of that. So you can check that out.

Today we start a new teaching series. If you have a Bible, go to John chapter 17. If you're new to the Bible, the Gospel of John was probably written by Jesus' best friend during his time on earth. It's an incredible account of the life of Jesus. This records Jesus' prayer. It was known throughout history as the high priestly prayer. It was Jesus' big prayer before the Father, just before he goes to the cross. And he ends the prayer like this in verse 24:

Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O Righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you and these know that you have sent me. I have made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.

Would you take a moment all of our locations. Let's just bow our head and open our hearts to God in a word of prayer.

*God, thank you for the privilege of gathering as the church. I know we come in from various backgrounds, different situations in our lives. Some of us, maybe this is the first time we've been to a church in our entire lives. And some of us, we've been a part of this family for months or weeks or years. I pray, in Jesus' name, that you would miraculously take this word and write it on our hearts individually and personally. And I pray that we would never be the same. In Jesus name, amen. Amen. Amen.*

Now as we dive into this new teaching series, we're going to take five weeks. Often times as followers of Christ, and as a church, we look at Jesus as our Savior. And we should. We look at Jesus as our king, or our master, or our teacher. And those are all really good things. But we're going to take the next five weeks to look at Jesus as our model for life, as our standard.

Psychologists suggest that 90 to 95 percent of all human behavior is learned through modeling. In other words, your mind and heart are hard wired to desire and identify a standard. You long for a standard. You desire it. You identify it and then you replicate it in your own life. Whether you're aware of it or not, your entire life is built on a collection of invisible standards that you've embraced.

Think back over your life. Maybe it was celebrities. Maybe it was family members. Maybe it was friends or kids you grew up with. Your entire life you've been looking at other people, identifying the worthy standard and then replicating it. In fact, that's just natural for human beings to do.

I can remember in my own life, when I was seven years old, a family moved into our neighborhood. The oldest son in this family was about 12. His name was Sebastian. I can remember, as a seven-year-old kid, looking at Sebastian, and not consciously, not even thinking about it, but just doing it, looking at him and going "oh look how he does his hair. I think I'm going to do my hair like that." He was a big skateboarder and so the next day I'm like, "Mom, I want a skateboard." And so I tried. I'm a terrible skateboarder. Anything with my feet is not a good plan for Justin. But I tried to be a skateboarder because Sebastian was a skate boarder. I remember he listened to Guns N'Roses. (Come on 80s. Guns and Roses.) And so I was like I need to listen to Guns and Roses. That's my new favorite band. Everything that Sebastian did, I did, because he became my standard.

I could remember in second grade looking at a fifth grader and, back in those days, the fifth grader was pegging his pants... in Jesus name. Some of you are like "pegging his what?" It was a big deal back then. You would fold your pants over you know and so I was I was looking at him and like... "I'm pegging my pants now." This is how we do it. This is my standard.

As a kid growing up I loved basketball. I can still clearly remember the Gatorade commercial where they sang the song "Like Mike." Some of you guys know what I'm talking about. (you know. maybe not. okay.) Where Michael Jordan is the guy in the commercial and he's taking shots... (for some of you younger guys, Michael Jordan was a basketball player. and he was pretty good and he played for the Chicago Bulls) ...taking shots and then they'd show a ten-year-old kid taking shots. They had this song in the background that I would wake up to every morning in my mind:

"Sometimes I dream that he is me. You've got to see that's how I dream to be. (and then the drums come in: boom boom boom boom.) I dream I move. I dream I groove. Like Mike. If I could be like Mike."

I mean that was it for me. If I could, I'd watch that and I'd be like, "Yeah that's it. I'm going to the NBA. It's settled. I'm gonna be like Mike." That's just my standard. That's how I thought.

You've been following a standard in little things in your life forever. Think about how you cook. Maybe you cook recipes from your mom or your grandmother or you grandfather because that's the standard that you've set. Maybe you have the same meal at Thanksgiving or at Christmas because there's a standard. The way you dress is based upon some standard. Maybe it's a standard that you've learned

from work or from some family member. If you're a man here today, the way that you treat a woman, that is a standard that you learned from someone, no matter what your standard might be.

And then big things like, "How do I parent my children?" You learned this from a standard either consciously or subconsciously. You've adopted a certain standard. And of course the big thing, "How do I interact with God?" That's a standard that you learned and picked up from someone, somewhere. In fact, I would suggest to you today that if you're here and you find yourself a successful person, your secret to success is the standards you've embraced, whether it is a hard work ethic or a particular focus in your business. That standard you learned from somewhere and that standard is the secret for why you've succeeded. I would also suggest to you today that your biggest problems in life — your fears, your anxieties, your struggles, your doubts — are fueled by an unconscious or conscious standard that you've embraced.

Now the New Testament gives us a very definitive model for life when it says, "*Fix your eyes on Jesus.*" The Apostle Peter writes it like this, "Follow in his steps." I like that. "Follow in his steps." In other words, Jesus helps us understand how we should spend our time. He helps us understand how we should interact with other people. We're actually going to look at that next week. He helps us understand what things we should value and what things we shouldn't value in life. But more than anything, the most important standard that Jesus sets for people is how human beings should interact with God. He sets for us a specific standard for how human beings should interact with God and we see him modeling that standard from the very first words he speaks in scriptures. If you're familiar with the Bible, the very first story that has Jesus speaking to another person in the story is in Luke chapter 2. He's 12 years old in the story and his parents have lost him at the temple in Jerusalem. They finally find him sitting with the rabbis and they say, "Jesus, where have you been?" and this is what he says in Luke chapter 2 verse 49:

And he said to them "Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my father's business?"

(A twelve-year-old kid, right? Geez.)

I could imagine Mary and Joseph were like, "What? Are you talking about God? Are you calling God, "Father?"

In fact, 189 times in the four Gospels, Jesus refers to *God as Father*. It was a massive emphasis in his life and in his teaching, and how he models interaction with the creator. In fact he goes so far, in John chapter 5 verse 19, to say it like this:

"I tell you the truth, the son (he's speaking of himself) can do nothing by himself, he does only what he sees the father doing. Whatever the father does, the son also does."

In other words he's saying, "Listen I am in perfect unity with God. I am in lockstep with God and he interacts with me as a father interacts with a son. That's who I am. That's how I interact with God."

In fact, if you zoom out and you look at all four Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John — what you will find is that it is clear that the defining characteristic of the life of Jesus is this unique dynamic personal relationship with God as Father. In John chapter 17, when Jesus prays, six times he refers to the Father. And look how he wraps up the prayer in verse 24:

"Father (big surprise, right?) I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am."

Now that's present tense. This is not grammar for geniuses. Present tense. "With me, where I am."

He doesn't say, "I wish that they'll be with me where I'm going." He says, "I desire that they are with me where I am now." This is interesting because, according to the text, he is surrounded by the disciples.

So imagine being John or Peter or James. You're sitting with Jesus. You're listening to him praying. He says "God I just wish James was here." James, like present tense. You can imagine being at a party and you're with Joe and you're with Bill. And you're talking to Bill and Joe is standing next to you. And you're just like, "Man Bill, I just wish Joe was here. It'd be so great if Joe was here." Joe would be like, "I'm here. What are we talking about?" Jesus is saying, "I just wish my disciples were with me where I am," and they're all like, "We are!"

Of course Jesus is not saying I wish that they were physically with me because they were. Instead, he's saying, I wish that they were relationally with me. "I wish, Lord, that they saw relationship with you like I see it. I wish, Father, that they had this dynamic union with you that I have." "Father my great prayer for the church," says Jesus, "is that they would pursue relationship with you above everything else in life."

Pause for a second. Do you pursue relationship with God above everything else in your life?

This is Jesus' great desire for you. Think about your own life for a second. Do you pursue relationship with God above your family? Do you pursue relationship with God above your job? Do you pursue relationship with God above your comfort? When is the last time you denied comfort in pursuit of relationship with God? This is Jesus' big prayer for you. And if we're honest I think that many of us in the room today, at all of our locations, would say, "Justin, relationship with God is not the most vibrant, dynamic, exciting thing in my life. In fact I'm far more excited about my job. I'm far more excited about this new relationship. I'm far more excited about this new car I just bought than I am about a dynamic relationship with God. It's not that thrilling."

And for some of us, we don't have deep communion with God. Instead our view of God is more like a judge and a criminal. A judge and a criminal don't hang out on the weekends. They only see each other when something's gone wrong. That's how our relationship with God is for many of us. You just show up when it's time to deal with an issue, when there's a problem. Then you show up and you always feel like he's condemning you for something. And you're just hoping you get out of there with as little damage to your functional life as possible. This is how many of us interact with God.

Some of us in the room, we interact with God more like a master and a slave. You say, "Okay God, I know you've got a plan for my life and I don't think it's anything that I want to do but you're God, so fine. I guess I'll just deal with your plan, sort of. But I'm going to kind of drag my feet the whole way and be bitter about it." That's how many of us interact. I know because you set up meetings with me and I have to listen to it. (some of my issues venting there... I'm sorry.)

Some of us interact with God like a genie and Aladdin. If I could just sit in on your prayer time. It's "Okay I need a house. I need a spouse. I need some cash. I need a better job. I need a better that. Can you give me a car too and...How many of these do I have left? How many wishes do I get?" That's your

relationship with God. If we did a little experiment — that of course we cannot physically do — but if we just collected all the evidence of your personal prayers, I think we would see clearly what your relationship with God really looks like. What the dynamic between you and God is. And I think that, for many of us, it doesn't quite look the same as what Jesus is describing. In fact, when you collect the New Testament prayers, what you find is that there are very few requests for houses and spouses. There are very few requests for the things of life. It's not wrong that we ask God for those things. In fact he tells us to. But that did not dominate the prayers recorded in the New Testament. In fact, if you read the prayers recorded in the New Testament, you find that the vast majority of them center around just one thing, "God, I just want to know you. God, I just want you to be my Father. Open the eyes of my understanding so I could see you clearly. Help me know you. Help me experience you."

I wonder, does that dominate your prayer life? Does a longing just to know and be in relationship with your Creator dominate your prayer life? Because when we look at the words of Jesus, it doesn't at all sound like he's making requests to a genie. It doesn't at all sound like he's making an appeal to a judge. It doesn't sound like he's a slave bringing his plea to a master. Instead it clearly sounds like an intimate conversation between a father and a son. Look at it again with me. Verse 24:

Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you and these know that you have sent me.

Did you notice in those two verses how confident Jesus is? Did you notice in those two verses he says, "I know you love me and I know that I know you."? How many of us in this room, at all of our locations, would say that dominates my prayer life? That I have that type of confidence in my prayers, "God I know you love me and I know that I know you."

That was how Jesus prayed. "I am certain. I am so sure." But he also gives us a glimpse into the history of their relationship. I don't know if you caught it, but he said, "Father you have loved me before the foundation of the world." Now this is of course a claim to deity. Jesus is saying, "I am NOT just a carpenter from Nazareth. I am the Incarnate God. I am the eternal uncreated son that the Father and the son have been in this union, this relationship, from before there were planets, before there were humans, before there was anything. There was God in communion with God; Father and Son in this divine dance of love and unity. This is what Jesus is claiming. CS Lewis — a great Christian writer — he helps us understand it like this:

All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that 'God is love.' But they seem not to notice that the words 'God is love' have no real meaning unless God contains at least two Persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love. [Christians] believe that the living, dynamic activity of love has been going on in God forever and has created everything else... The union between Father and Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is a Person... What grows out of the joint life of the Father and the Son is a real Person; is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God.

(turn to the person next to you and say, "That's kind of deep. That kind of lost me there. That's kind of deep.")

We just gazed into the Trinity, the great mystery. We think of father and son and we always think, time. The father created the son. That's how it works on planet Earth. But what if sonship and fatherhood are not actually physical things first? What if that dynamic, that relationship, was a spiritual thing long before the physical was ever created? What if God the Father has been in relationship with God the Son in an uncreated unified dance of love from all eternity past? And the unity between the father and son, the spirit of their relationship is so substantive, so real and so powerful that this unity is also a person, the Holy spirit. And this dynamic union between father and son has been going on forever. So what we see from this is Jesus saying, "Hey I know you've got your thoughts about God but I want to tell you that I'm not coming to you today with just informational knowledge. I don't want to tell you about what I read about God in a book or what I watched about God in the documentary." Jesus I saying, "No, no, no. I don't just have informational knowledge. I have experiential knowledge. I know him. In fact I came so that you could see him clearly."

Look at what Jesus says in John 1:

"No one's ever seen God but the one and only son who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the father has made him known."

Jesus is saying, "You've got some distorted views of God and I have come so that those distorted views can be extinguished and you can see him like he really is. You can interact with him as he truly is."

Your entire life, you've been thinking about him wrong. You thought he was a tyrant. You thought he was far away. You thought he was a slave driver. You thought he was giving these demands to rob you of joy. You thought that the limits he created and the rules he established and the holiness he demanded were all to steal something from you. Not realizing that those rules were in fact to maximize your joy. Everything he does, he does to be a blessing; he does because he loves you; he does because he favors you. You've seen him as a tyrant. You've seen him as a judge. You've seen him as a master, but, Jesus says, first you got to see him as he truly is. He's a good father.

Now this messes with our mind a little bit. Many of us have heard this in the natural. We've accepted that thought, "Father God," but it's never sunk down into the soul, into the spirit, where it's really changed the way we live. We have a difficult time grasping this idea of *God as Father* because we're wired for a standard. You've been copying somebody your whole life: the way you dress, the way you talk, the way you act, what you eat. It's all built on some standard that you've evolved through your life, whether it is a TV commercial or a friend you knew or the family you grew up in. You've got all these standards that you've been building. When someone tells you *God is Father*, you and I immediately connect God to the father that we know. We connect God to the only concept of father that we have. So now our standard for God becomes our natural dad. This is a problem for many of us because, for many of us, the natural father you have was not perfect, and so your view is slightly distorted.

Interesting little facts:

- Friedrich Nietzsche, the well-known philosopher who famously announced that God is dead and fought vehemently against the Christian view of God; he lost his own father just before his fifth birthday.
- Bertrand Russell, a renowned atheist known for his writings, his father died when Bertrand was age four.

- John Paul Sartre, the French philosopher who shaped much of modern atheism today, his dad died when John was fifteen-months old.
- Voltaire (you may have been forced to read his writings in college), he changed his name because he hated his father so much and wanted no association with his natural dad.
- Sigmund Freud, the psychologist that is still studied and read today in universities across the world, he hated the Christian view of God and he said that his father was a sexually perverted man who abused their family and never supported them.

I wonder if their view of God was impacted by their dads. I wonder if yours has been. I wonder if the reason you feel like God is so far is because your dad was always so far. I wonder if the reason you feel like God has abandoned you is because your dad left when you were four. I wonder if you feel like you can't trust God with your problems because your dad always avoided confrontation. I wonder if you feel like God's never pleased because you were never good enough for your father's expectations. (Come on, turn to the person next to you and say, "He's going for the heart today. Oh dang, you came on a serious Sunday. He's going for the heart today.")

Some of us though had a great earthly father and you say, "See Justin, I'm perfect because I had a great earthly dad." But even your wonderful earthly father can limit your view of God because God is not just like your great earthly father. In fact God is not just like anyone. And when you use any standard to understand God other than God it distorts your view of God. And you can end up even finding limits for God because your earthly dad certainly isn't perfect no matter how good he is. In other words, what you have to do is disconnect and understand that though a good father may help you begin to understand God, God gets to define God. You must run to him to understand him alone.

Now many of us, we hear this and we say, "Okay, okay, okay, that's cool. I can believe that Jesus is the beloved son of the Father who has existed for eternity with God and I can believe that God loves the Son and the Son loves the Father and they've been in unity. And that's wonderful. But that doesn't mean he loves me. And that doesn't mean that he's my father. That means that he's Jesus' father. I don't know for sure that he's truly my father because that's a bit of a jump. Justin, Jesus being the Son of God and the perfect son, what does that have to do with me being a child of God? And the Son of God? And accepted and received and loved like Jesus is? Those things aren't the same. How can I know how God feels about me?

Well Jesus hides the answer to that question right in the end of his prayer. Look at verse 26. He says this

"I made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

"I in them." Those three little words hold the secret to your confidence. Those three little words unlock the mystery of what is Christianity. Many of us have thought of Christianity as a list of rules that we're supposed to obey. (How's that going for you?) Many of us have thought of Christianity as just a feel-good wonderful warm fuzzy feeling. But those warm fuzzy feelings run out. You need an anchor. You need something solid. You need something sure. Something better than your own righteous record. Something better than how you feel in the moment. You need something absolute that tells you that God truly is your father and you truly are his child and that something absolute is hidden in those three little words "I in them." See, God had a plan from the foundation of the world to give you assurance about your relationship with him. This is how Paul says it in Ephesians chapter one. It says,

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (We’re all good with that. God is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Fine, good. ) Who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we would be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us (not by our works) ...freely given us in the one He loves.

You have to see this today. You have to see this and it has to erupt on the inside of your soul. That Father and Son have existed from all eternity past in a unified love relationship. But they have likewise planned that, as they gazed upon the brokenness of their creation from before time even began, they saw the beginning and the end. And the divine Creator of all things said that, yes he will devise a plan to rescue broken humanity. And as the eternal Son took on flesh. The eternal Son died for the sins of the world, rose again, washed away the guilt of sin and shame, and then took up residence in the human heart so that Christ could dwell in your heart by faith. You could be rooted and grounded in love, and Paul could proclaim that Christ in you is the hope of glory.

So when you say yes to Jesus, a mysterious invisible reality takes place, (Come on your faith has got to get a hold of this today because it will change everything about who you are) an invisible reality takes place, where the Spirit of God — the very Spirit of Jesus — takes up residence in your inner person, and your heart is warmed to God, and your soul desires to be with him, and you find within your heart a spiritual assurance that you've been forgiven of sin. That inner witness is Christ himself in you. And if Christ dwells in you by faith, you place your faith in the work of Christ on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. And when you do, Christ comes to live inside of you. This is a mystery far beyond performance, far beyond religious rules. And Christ, as he dwells in you, is now the evidence to the Father that you are loved. In other words, this is what Jesus meant when he said that “the love that you love me may be in them.” Did you see that? “The love in which you love me may be in them.” What he's saying there is that, when the Father in heaven sees you, and you've placed your faith in Christ, what he sees is Christ in you. He perfectly loves the Son, which then means that he eternally and perfectly loves you with the exact same affection that he has for his one and only son.

This is what Paul meant when he said that every promise in Christ is yes and amen. (You got to see this) The Bible is full of thousands and thousands of promises, but they are for the righteous. And I don't know if you want to raise your hand, but I don't think you're perfectly righteous. Either am I. And yet Christ lived a perfectly righteous life, which tells us that every promise is now for Christ. Every one of them belongs to him because he lived a life that merited receiving the promise.

Every promise:

- the promise to be blessed
- the promise to be healed
- the promise to be faithful
- the promise that he'll never leave or forsake
- the promise that he'll take all your anxieties

Every promise belongs to Christ and now Christ dwells in you and that's why Paul says every promise in him is yes. And now he lives in you, which means every promise for you in all of scripture is yes and amen. (Come on you got to see it today)



I'm telling you that the favor that belongs to Jesus rests upon you and now you have the opportunity for something divine. John says it like this in first John chapter 1:

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you also (he's talking to you) you also may have fellowship with us and our Fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

That word fellowship is the Greek word Koinonia. It means an intimate communion, a deep friendship. That's what it means. He's saying that because you have Christ in you, you now have entrance, by the Spirit of Christ, into the union of Christ. Because remember, the Father and the Son have been in a union and in love for all eternity. That union is a person, the Spirit. That spirit now lives in you. The union between Father and Son lives in you, which gives you access by faith through prayer to be as close to the father as the son himself. Unity with God. This is why Jesus says in verse 26 of John 17:

"I have made known to them your name."

Father, I have made known to them your name. Which name? You looked up at the stars and you knew God as creator. You looked into your own conscience and you felt God as judge. But when you gaze upon the cross, you learn a new name for God. You learn the first name, the name that Jesus wants you to associate with God premiere, above all else. You learn the name, "Father." That's the name. I have made known to them, your name, the name "Father." Do you know that name? Is that name at the very center of your interaction with God? Does that name fuel your joy and extinguish your fear? Does that name give you comfort when you're alone? Does that name give you confidence when you're afraid? Father. Father. Father. Here's the mystery. You can know God like that. You can know God like that.

Jesus tells a story in the New Testament in the Gospel of Luke to help us understand who God really is. It's a story about two brothers. The youngest brother leaves home, lives his own way, makes up his own rules. And he discovers that that makes him miserable. There are many of us in the room like the younger brother. You've been living your whole life making up your own rules, going your own way. Saying "I'll lie to them. I'll sleep with him. I'll do this. I'll do that. I'll do whatever I want. I'm going to make up my own rules." And you found that, in the end, it's left you empty. It's left you alone and it's left you miserable. (I'm not trying to be dramatic; I'm just being real.) That's exactly how the younger son finds himself and he thinks to himself, "I've blown it with my father. I'll never be accepted back. Maybe if I just go home and offer myself as a hired servant, I can live in my father's house." And when he decides to return to the father, he takes the turn home. And as soon as he takes the turn home, the father was outside waiting for him every day for years. And when the father sees him, he runs to the son. He embraces the son and he says, "You will not be some hired hand. I will reestablish you as my son." That's how God receives those back who are far from him. If you're far from him today and you say, "Oh I don't know if God would. You don't know how many stupid things I've done." You don't know what great thing he did on the cross. Every sin you've ever committed has already been washed away so that the Father can embrace you as a son. That's his word for you. That's his word for you.

But many of us, we're like the older son in the story. The older son hangs back. The older son serves the father faithfully and remains in his home but never has relationship. He treats the father like a master and a servant relationship, not like father and son. He's bitter and he's frustrated and he's always striving and struggling, always feeling like he hasn't quite done enough to be approved. Some of us would call ourselves Christians, but that's your experience. Always wrestling with the same sins. Always falling back

into the same patterns. Never experiencing the love of God. That feels like a distant idea to you. Today is your day to experience God as Father. See this is the standard of Jesus. Remember our series. This next five weeks is called the standard and this is the standard that Jesus sets. He says, "This is how I actually live. I, Jesus, have lived for all eternity in unhindered unbroken fellowship with God as Father. And so can you. So can you." So here's our first standard. (You can jot it down if you'd like):

Live today in Christ with God as Father.

Live today, right now, right here, in Christ with God as Father.

Live today in Christ with God as Father.

There's a practical way for you to know if you're doing this. You know that you're doing this if the words of Jesus no longer seem ridiculous to you. Like in Matthew chapter 5 and 6, Jesus says, "Don't worry about anything." Now to the natural mind that sounds ridiculous. "Don't worry about anything? Really? Everybody worries, Jesus." Everybody worries about things. People worry about their clothes. People worry about their cars. People worry about their house. People worry about their kids. Everybody worries about everything. But Jesus says, "Actually, no. When you understand who your father is, when that revelation has gone from your head to your heart, you actually don't have to worry about anything." And if you're still bound up and worried, you haven't discovered the Father God.

"Don't worry about anything." Those are the words of Jesus. When that truth starts to become real to you, you know that God the Father has been revealed to your heart. That you no longer need to live for the approval of others. That you no longer need to strive and struggle and cling to control.

If God is Father (stay with me today) If God is Father, that means protection because one of the promises in the Bible is that he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one, that God will never leave you or forsake you, that God is a shield to the righteous. If that's a promise, it belongs to Jesus. And if Jesus is in you, it belongs to you. Protection.

If God is Father, that means provision because Jesus says he takes care of the grass the fields, of the birds of the air. He's not going to let you starve. He's not going to let you lack. If you trust him, he will always provide for you. That's the promise. You have a perfect promise of absolute provision for the rest of your life and beyond this life. That's the promise. If God really is Father.

If *God is Father* that means he's guidance. You don't ever have to be lost for a moment in this life because he's a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. That's a promise for you if God is Father.

See how this changes everything. Because now you find yourself secure in your provision, confident in your protection, sure of your guidance. How different your life would look if God was Father to you.

If God is Father, that means discipline. Just like a loving father disciplines his child, the perfect Father of spirits takes things away at times to teach you to trust him. And God is Father means inheritance. It means he has stored up for you beyond what you can even imagine. In fact the scripture says it is beyond all imagination what he stores up for those who love Him. This is what it means.

But above all else God is Father means relationship. I can say humbly about my own life, that I adore my wife and I love my kids. I'm thankful for my friends. But in my own heart, relationship with the Father is the center of my life.

We need to go deeper. We need to go deeper because this revelation is progressive. In other words you don't get it all in one shot. You notice, in the scriptures, it says, Jesus said "I have made known to them your name and I will (did anybody catch it?) continue to make it known." "I will continue to make it known."

What's he saying? He's saying, "You haven't arrived. You haven't figured this out as God as Father." If you're here, and maybe you've been a Christian for thirty years, you still haven't arrived in your understanding of God as Father, and neither have I, because he's revealing it more and more and more. How can I live this today? You're here and you say, "I want to understand God as Father. I want to know him as Father. How can I live this?"

Let me give you a few quick things as we wrap up today, a few practical things. The first is pray this every single day. Pray this every single day. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father..." Why did he do that? He knew you'd forget tomorrow. He knew that you would start treating God like a judge and a criminal. You would start treating God like a master and a slave. You would start treating God like a genie and Aladdin. You'd do it so fast without even realizing it. So every day pray it, so you don't forget who He is to you.

The second thing is talk about it. Talk about it with friends. Talk about it in a small group, in a community group. Talk about it this week with people over the Bible.

The third thing is memorize scriptures about it. Years ago I went through the entire New Testament and I circled every single time the New Testament says "in Christ," "with Christ," "in Him," or "with Him." And I found dozens of dozens of dozens of promises about who you are because Christ lives in you. That practice will change your life. Memorize those scriptures. Meditate on those scriptures. Live and feed your soul daily on those scriptures.

So we pray. We talk about it. We memorize. But then there are moments of divine encounter. Moments where the Spirit of God tears back the veil and our hearts experience God as Father in a profound and personal way. I believe that today is one of those moments. Those moments where the sky breaks open, the dove descends and the words are heard, "This is my beloved son. This is my beloved daughter. And I'm well pleased with you."

In your own heart, when you pray, do you have that confidence?  
I know you love me and I know that I know you.

Stand your feet at all of our locations. Close your eyes just for a moment. Close your eyes. Quiet your soul. I know you've got a thousand other things going on in life, but this is just a moment for you and God. I want to pray and then we are going to sing. I've been praying for you all week and for myself. I've been praying that today would be one of those moments, one of those moments in your life where God takes something from your head and transfers it down to your heart. If you examine the landscape of your own soul, do you find evidence that you have not been convinced that he's your father? Fears about the future? Shame about the past? Worries about tomorrow? Anxieties? All of these are evidence that God needs to reveal himself as Father to you. Striving for approval? Proving yourself to your boss, your neighbor, your brother, your co-worker? All of these are evidence that God needs to reveal himself as Father to you. Bitterness about the laws that God speaks to us? Frustration over the things that God seems to take away? These are all evidence that you need to experience God as a good Father today.

I encourage you to lift your hands right now. I want to pray. I want to pray that today would be one of those divine moments.

Father we look right now to you. Father, tear back the veil that distorts our view of you. We come to you by faith right now. Reveal the cross to us that we would see in our souls that we are accepted through Christ as your children. Extinguish our anxieties. Overwhelm our insecurities. Right now we stretch out in faith toward you. Meet us as we sing. In Jesus name, Amen.