

Sermon Title: Father's Heart of God – November 2009 (Scripture is from NIV)

Introduction

Good morning everyone. My name is John-Michael Becker. I am a full time orphanage volunteer at Geon Christian Children's Home in Seoul, South Korea. I graduated from Virginia Tech in May 2005 with a degree in Systems engineering. Through prayer, fasting, and waiting, the Lord soon made it clear to both me and my family that I was to live as a missionary at the orphanage in Korea. I have been serving there as a volunteer for almost four years now. I teach English and basketball to the children, eat meals with them, and spend quality time with them in their rooms at night. I also direct an orphanage volunteering ministry in Seoul called, "Jerusalem Ministry." If you are interested in learning more about the orphanage ministry or would like to receive updates from me, please do talk with me with after the service.

Today's Plan

What I'd like to do this morning is share with you all some of my experiences with the children in Korea and how they relate to God's fatherly love for His people. The title of this message is, "The Father's Heart of God." Before I get into the message I'd like to say a prayer...

Pray (invite the Holy Spirit)

Main Passage

Please open your Bibles with me to Mark 1. I will read for us verses 9 – 13. This will be the main passage I will be speaking out of today.

Mark 1:9-13 – At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven "**You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.**" At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

What we just read is one of the most famous passages in the Bible. It is a moment where the trinity is clearly represented through Jesus, the voice of the Father, and the presence of the Spirit descending upon Jesus. This is one of the most critical moments of Jesus' life. In each of the Gospels there are no records of ministry or healing before His baptism. We can clearly concur that Jesus received power from the Spirit descending upon Him in this moment. But it's the words of the Father that I want us to focus on today. Through the words of the Father I want to point out four attributes of true fatherly love.

Acceptance

Let's look together again at the Father's words. I am going to break up each of the statements and go deeper into them. The first of them is this: "You are my Son." You are my Son. The first attribute of true fatherly love is acceptance. **Acceptance.** Allow me to explain.

Children Homes of the World

As I mentioned before in the introduction, I have been serving at a children's home in South Korea for about four years now. You might be surprised to hear that nearly all of the children in my home have at least one parent alive, with a number of them having two. It is because of

reasons such as poverty, drugs or alcohol, abuse, prison term, disease or sickness, or abandonment that the children have been placed in the homes. And this is actually true for orphanages all around the world... in Mozambique, Nepal, Cambodia, India, and pretty much every other country.

These children are not “true orphans” according to the definition. They have family. And for some of them, they actually have rich and successful relatives. For many of the kids in these homes in South Korea, they will visit their parents or relatives once a month or a couple times a year. Their relationships are strained though. Often the parents or relatives will treat the children to a nice meal when they are together, but there is little connection. For many of the children, as they grow older they will only visit to receive gifts or money and for some they will simply stop with the visits. There is no connection. There is no identity. And when they are together with their family, they are only reminded of this.

Would it be too far for me to say that this applies for most of the children of today? **That there are far more orphans in this world who are literally living with their family, but are not a part of them?** That there are many who have little identity or connection with their father? There is a great need for the love of a father in this world.

In Jesus’ case, He knew from the beginning that His Father was God rather than Joseph. This was demonstrated when Jesus was a boy and left His family to go into the temple to be in “His Father’s house.” Just like my children in Korea, and nearly all other children, Jesus knew who His true parent was.

But as I just stated, few sons and daughters are affirmed in their identity. Many of the children of today’s generation are growing up without the presence of their fathers. Many of these same children, as they grow older, begin to deny connection with their fathers. They say things like, “He was never really there for me.” Or, “I don’t really know Him.” But God would not stand for this. At the baptism God chose to break a silence that had lasted centuries. Whereas for generations and generations God had chosen to speak through dreams or through prophets and angels, He chooses here to speak directly to His Son. He speaks to Jesus and affirms His identity by declaring, “You are my son.”

These are the words that so many need to hear. God recognizes us. He knows us and He knows us intimately. We have a special relationship with Him.

In Genesis 2 we read that God brought all the living animals and birds to Adam for Adam to name them. Adam named every single creature but himself. But who named Adam? **It was God who named him.** Adam, made in the image of God, was named by God. He had a special relationship and acceptance that separated him from all of the rest of creation. And this is the same relationship and acceptance that every child of God has received from the Father.

Reflect on that for a moment. Think about all of creation... all the different plants and animals... just how vast creation is. And out of all of it, God chose to name us. God chose to send His Son to die for us. God accepts us. He was our true Father from the very beginning and through Christ He is still our true Father today. He wants us. He formed us and called us. He accepts us. And He loves us.

His Unfailing Love

This is the next attribute of a true father: Love. Let's look back at Mark 1:11...

Mark 1:11 – And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, **whom I love**; with you I am well pleased.

“Whom I love.” Let me share a little with you about my experiences of the love of God...

Having two sisters, God has taught me how to give and receive love as a brother to a sister. I have also learned how to give and receive love as a son, as a friend, as a servant, and even as a father with the children at my home. I've grown some in loving as a brother to a brother. I've yet to experience the love a groom has for his bride. **Each love is different.** The love I have for my friends is different from the love I have for my sisters or for my parents and is also different from the love I have for the children in my children's home in Korea. There are different emotions stirred depending on the relationship.

For example: receiving approval or affirmation as a son from a father is so powerful. When a son receives words like, “I am so proud of you” or “You are doing a great job,” from their father, strength and confidence rise up within them. Yet receiving approval as a father from a young son is not as critical. Rather it is the son receiving the affirmation and shining from it that moves the father. I'm not saying that these different relationships have completely different types of love, it just seems that each has certain different parts of love that are stronger than others... and for some it's a part of love that can't be found in other relationships, such as the love of a bride and a groom.

I have a lot of love for all my friends. But I have to admit, there are certain people that I feel a stronger love for. It's stronger than a love as a friend, but it's not a love as a lover. There is a stronger love **to shelter, to approve, and to bless** for these certain people. What I feel is that the love for the person is not just a love as a friend, but it incorporates the other loves as well... and for most it's a love of a father that is stirring in me. It brings a stronger love. It's incorporating different parts of love from two different types of relationships: the love of a friend and the love of a father. **As I experience this, it humbles me in thinking of just how powerful God's love is for us because the love I feel at times for some people is so strong.** And again, it's not the love a groom has towards his bride... I can only imagine how much stronger that love is. And imagining all these loves being put together is so powerful.

God calls us His bride, His children, and His friends... this love is too great to comprehend. Even the love a good general has for his soldiers is powerful. And the love of a good shepherd. Different emotions are stirred in each relationship. Imagine the love you have for your wife or husband, added with the love you have for your friends, added with the love you have for your brothers and sisters, and added onto that the love you have for your children. That is a love likely too great to even comprehend. And the love of God for us is even greater!

I believe I've only tapped into the father's love a little. I believe there is so much more, but if I had too much of it I would collapse. God is gradually giving me more as I'm getting more and more firmly rooted in Him. **God's fatherly love is so pure, so strong, so protective, so affirming... His heart yearns and goes out to His children.** He wants them, no matter what. *He will not give up on them.*

Filling the Cup

I've grown to understand 1John 4:19, "**We love because He first loved us.**" For the children that enter my children's home, many of them have not received love in their lives. They don't know love. It hasn't been demonstrated to them. Their cup is empty and they have nothing to offer. So I know not to expect love from these children. I know that they will likely reject any love I give them. **But that doesn't stop me.** My arms and legs are longer than theirs and I'm able to chase them and give them a hug. ☺ Often they will fight it off. And if I say kind words to them or discipline them, they won't know how to react and some of them will even respond with insults. **But I know these aren't bad kids, they just don't know love.** And so I keep on loving them. I keep pouring from the cup of love that God has given me into their little empty cups.

Soon, when I chase them and give them a hug, the children won't fight anymore. They will just stand. It's like hugging a tree, but at least the tree isn't trying to escape. It's then that I know progress is being made. Kind words or discipline are met by silence or quiet obedience. Progress!

And then, after some more love, I will run to them to give a hug and rather than them running from me or simply standing, they will open their arms to me. **They have received enough love from me to know that I'm safe, can be trusted, and that the love from me is good.** Their cup of love is nearly full.

And soon enough, it's no longer me having to chase the kids or sneaking up on them for a hug. It is them chasing me. It is them sneaking up on me. They have learned love and they are now able to not just receive it, but give it.

And soon I know they will not just be able to love those who love them, **but they will be able to chase after and love those who don't know love.** They will be able to endure rejection and persevere. They will be able to be like Jesus, who despite being rejected and mistreated by man, still chose to forgive and love us. They will be able to endure all things because of the pure love they have from the Father. It's in His love that we are able to overcome all evil and all wrong.

God loves you. He loves you and will continue to love you. He knows where you are at and He wants to overflow your cup with His love. Our Father will not give up on us. His arms are always reaching out to us.

Affirmation

So far we have read about God's acceptance and love for us. Let's look back at Mark 1:11...

Mark 1:11 – And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

"With you I am well pleased." God has given Jesus acceptance and love, and now He gives Him affirmation. This is the part that hits me the most.

What has Jesus done so far in His life? Its verse 11 of Mark and the first 8 verses were about John the Baptist. All Jesus has done so far in His life that Mark felt worth noting was that He got

baptized. There have been no miracles. There have been no parables. There are no disciples or new believers. Jesus has simply taken a step that is expected of every believer: He got baptized.

God chose not to wait to affirm Jesus until Jesus had done some amazing acts. He chose not to wait for Jesus to endure rejection or the cross. Before Jesus did a thing, God says to Jesus, “You are my Son. I love you. **I am pleased with you.**” There is nothing we need to do to earn the Father’s love and affirmation. He simply calls us to walk in it.

Romans 5:8 – But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

When the prodigal son in Luke 15 returned in shame to his father, after wasting his father’s money in a life of sin and selfishness, it was the father who ran to the son. It was the father who hugged and kissed him. It was the father who gave his son the best robe, a ring for his finger, and sandals for his feet. It was the father who had a great celebration made for the son. What had the son done to deserve all this? He had rejected his father and lived a life of shame. But this doesn’t matter. His father accepts him. His father loves him. His father even affirms him. Why? **Because he is his son.**

The prodigal son was afraid of how his father would respond when he returned. He feared rejection and expected demotion. But his father loved him just the same. And his father’s unfailing love drove out the fear within him.

1John 4:18 – There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

At my children’s home I don’t love the children based on their performance. I don’t pick out certain kids who listen better or are more loving and choose to focus on them. God is a father to the fatherless... not just to a few, but to all of them!

When a father sees his newborn baby, he doesn’t say, “I won’t be proud of this baby until he can walk, talk, and change his own diaper.” No. Simply seeing the little one brings pride to the father. He sees himself in his child. And so he loves and he affirms.

God wants to tell you that He is well pleased with you. God is proud of each and every one of you. You bear His image. You were made in His likeness. He knew you even in the womb and His love for you is infinite. **You don’t have to earn His love. Through Christ’s sacrifice, you are never unworthy of His love.** God loves you, and nothing can separate us from this love. No sin, no mistake, no trauma can take away His deep love for you. If you feel there is something blocking you from knowing this perfect love, please come to receive prayer after the message. God’s arms are open to you.

Discipline

And so in Mark 1:11 we have covered three powerful attributes of the Father’s heart: acceptance, love, and affirmation. There is one more attribute though that must be added, and that is discipline. Now we just covered how God’s love drives out all fear and that His love is unconditional. We just covered how we don’t have to do things to earn God’s affirmation. So why discipline?

Hebrews 12:7-8 – Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

Many of the children in the homes in Korea come from rough backgrounds. Many of them either weren't disciplined before coming to the home or they were disciplined through abuse or other wrong methods. Because of this, the kids can be very difficult. The social workers at the home, who usually have to take care of at least 12 of the kids, can tend to give up in disciplining the more difficult kids. They feel if they just make sure the child is fed, clothed, and sheltered, that they have done enough. They don't want to put all the effort into disciplining the child and would rather just overlook the wrong behavior.

But this not only allows the child to get away with bad behavior, it places a feeling in the child that no one cares about him. Many of the children act in disobedience as a cry for attention. **When they no longer receive any attention for their behavior, they experience the identity of a true orphan.** Scripture is clear in verse 8 saying that if a child is not disciplined, then the child is illegitimate.

Sometimes I fear disciplining the children because I want them to like me. I fear that if I discipline them they will turn on me. **But if I truly loved the children, I would think of their future.** I would know that by me tolerating their bad behavior now, I am setting a precedent for their lifetime.

To my surprise, it has been the children that I have been the most faithful in disciplining that have been the most receptive to my love. By me not giving up on them and continuing to love while being firm with them, they have come to realize that I truly value them. I'm not going to give up on them. I'm not going to ignore them. I'm going to train them in the way that is right.

I've learned that not disciplining poor behavior is the same as tolerating injustice. It's simply looking away. God will never do this to His loved ones. He won't tolerate injustice. God disciplines us to teach us how to love. It's through His discipline that we are strengthened and can be sure of His desires for us.

Hebrews 12:11 – 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.

Protection in Temptation

So what is the result of knowing the Father's heart toward us? How do His acceptance, His love, His affirmation, and His discipline affect us? Look back at Mark 1. It is right after the Father's words to Jesus that He is taken into the wilderness to be tempted. It is right after Jesus' identity as a son is confirmed that He is now able to both endure the temptations of Satan and also perform the ministry God has called Him to. Jesus is now protected and secure in His identity in God.

When Jesus is in the wilderness, what are Satan's temptations? "If you are the Son of God..." "If you are the Son of God..." "Bow down and worship me." **Satan attacks Jesus' identity.** He wants Jesus to doubt who He is in God. Satan wants this for every believer. He wants us to

doubt who we are in God and wander from Him. This is why knowing the Father's heart is so important. It is in Him that we have the strength and security to overcome every obstacle in our way. It is walking under His covering of love that gives us security and strength.

At my home I coach some of the junior high girls in basketball every Thursday night. During a recent practice, one of the girls arrived late, coming from a school project. She looked really down. She then shared with the girls that a girl at school had committed suicide. I watched as a heaviness fell on the kids. Another suicide. You might not have known this, but Korea has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, with celebrities, top business executives, and even recently a former president killing themselves. Suicide is something my kids hear about often, with many of the victims being students who are stressed from school, without love and affirmation, and lost without purpose. I told the girls to never think of suicide and told them to talk to me or to one of the workers if they ever feel down or depressed. I continued to coach the girls and lead them through practice, and very quickly the mood began to lighten. I saw brightness grow on their faces as they played and I joked with them. The girl who had looked the most discouraged with the news, Soo Jin, was smiling and laughing more and more as practice went on. I know this is what this young generation needs: attention, love and affirmation.

This is what God desires us to pour out upon the next generation. And this is what God is consistently pouring out upon us. When we understand that God accepts us, loves us, affirms us, and disciplines us to make us stronger, we have greater power in prayer. We are no longer praying from the standpoint of a mere human standing on earth crying out to a great and distant God. Rather, we are praying from the standpoint of sons and daughters with an intimate relationship with our Father. We know His heart for us. And we know His heart for His creation. He accepts us, loves us, and affirms us. Let me close with 1John 3:1...

1:John 3:1 – How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Pray

****Another Story****

Arms of Love

Every year at the children's home where I serve a team of doctors and nurses will visit and administer flu shots to the children. This is a terrifying time for many of the younger children. I remember one year I stood outside the building where they were giving the shots and watched as some of the young kindergarten boys looked towards the building like it was a haunted house. They weren't sure what was happening in there and they were pretty sure they wanted none of it.

Then I watched as a big, burly doctor came out of the building with a cigarette in his mouth and walked straight up to the boys. Without saying a word, he grabbed one of the boys and swooped him up on his shoulder and turned to carry him into the building for his shot. All of the boys reacted in the same way. Blood curdling screams. "NOOOOO!!!" And they scattered in all directions. I watched as the dorm moms called for the older boys to chase each younger one

down. It was like a prison break. Most of the boys were tackled, but I noticed little Ji Won eluded everyone and made it back to his dorm room.

I walked into the dorm room and found him clinging to his dorm mom and crying out, “주사 안맞아! 주사 안맞아!” “I won’t take the shot! I won’t take the shot!” The boy was shaking from fear and could not stop crying. The dorm mom could only hold him and comfort him. Despite his cries, we knew he needed the shot. I was concerned the boy would hate me, but I knew the shot was what was best for him. I opened my arms to take him to the building and his dorm mother gave him over to me.

I held him tight and kept telling him it would be okay. I told him that he is strong, so strong. He was still shaking, but held me back tight and stopped yelling. As we walked outside we passed the boy who had been swept up by the doctor and received the shot. I had to laugh to myself because the boy’s eyes were still wide open from the shock of it all. I told Ji Won, “See, Won Bin is okay. You will be okay too.” :) And I continued to hold him tight and comfort him.

We entered the building and, while still holding Ji Won, I spoke with the nurse for Ji Won and told her his information. Then I placed Ji Won on her lap for the shot. But as I set him down Ji Won reached out to me and cried, “JM, 가지마!” “Don’t go!” The nurse smiled and gave him back to me. I held him tight and sat down by the nurse. I continued to speak comforting words into him as they gave him his shot into his arm. And just like that, it was over. I told him he did a great job and that he is so strong and held him close one more time. Then I handed him back to his dorm mom and she continued to hold him peacefully.

Later that night at dinner in the cafeteria Ji Won ran up to me and took my hand. He asked me to please sit and eat with him tonight. And while we sat on the floor and ate he leaned into me, secure and at peace. Earlier he had felt alone and terrified, but as he felt the arms of his dorm mother and then me hold him securely and heard our comforting words, his fear began to pass. He could endure. He learned he was strong. And he learned he could trust.

Isaiah 40:11 - He tends his flock like a shepherd; he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those who have young.