

Psalm 139 – Beyond Father and Friend

Well friends it's Father's Day today, and as we mark this occasion and honor our fathers I'm curious to know what sort of father did you have, What sort of father do you think you are, and what sort of father do you think you want to be?

And if you need some help in answering that question, allow me to present you with a few different types of dads – courtesy of those “what kind of so-and-so are you” online surveys.

There is the provider dad. He works hard to make sure his family has a home, food, clothes, and all the important things they need.

There is the fixer dad. He is handy and skilled with tools and repairs and building things. If something is broken or not working right Dad can fix it.

There is the coach dad. Secretly praying that his wife will give birth to however many boys are needed to have a full roster

for his favorite sports team – this dad is teaching his kids to throw a baseball, football or kick a soccer ball even before they can walk.

There is the outdoor dad. He loves hiking, fishing, camping – anything that you can do outside and leaves the creature comforts of civilization behind.

There's the tech dad. Whatever amazing new gadget or gizmo is being released by Apple, Samsung or some new and upcoming tech company no one has even heard of before – this dad has it before anyone else. Check out his new 96”curved plasma chroma-color retina multi-channel display monitor – with sync upload so he can also watch it remotely on his tablet.

And of course there's the protector dad. Most times the protector dad has one or more daughters, and there is no way he will let anything or anyone in this world hurt them.

Protector dads are often seen walking their little girls to school, or cleaning their gun collection on the front porch

when teen-aged boys come to pick up their daughters for a date.

I think if you asked my daughter she would say that I'm mostly a fixer dad, with a bit of the protector dad thrown in as well.

Now I'm bringing up these stereotypes and asking how they might describe your connection with fatherhood because it seems that how we understand and perceive our relationship with our fathers – more than any other factor – determines how we understand and perceive our relationship with God.

Was your dad the provider? Then chances are you expect God to be your provider and relate to him primarily in this way...

Was your dad the fixer? You will expect God to fix things in your life the way your dad did...

Was your dad the outdoors guy? You might feel closest to God when you are out in nature...

Was your dad the coach? You probably connect to the whole idea of playing for God's team...

You can see how this is working out, right?

And, friends – this isn't necessarily a bad thing. This is part of how God intended us to come to know Him.

As we learned in our series a couple months back on Covenant Parenting – the normal way that human beings learn about their relationship with God is through what their mother and father teach them as they grow up – not only through specific instruction, but through how parents - fathers especially - live their lives and relate to their children.

So, as the writer of Hebrews is trying to teach his readers about God's discipline, he makes reference to the training and discipline his readers would have received from their fathers. He says "*We have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!*" Hebrews 12:9

So, assuming that his readers had good fathers who disciplined them out of love, in order to train their children to grow up well – it's a good comparison that can teach us more about our relationship with God.

And so – assuming that we've have good relationships with our fathers – as they are providers, fixers, protectors, coaches – this paternal relationship also works well in providing us with a starting point to begin to grow in our understanding of the relationship we have with a Divine Being who is beyond anything we have ever known, experienced, or can wrap our minds around.

Think about that for a moment friends... how we - as mortal, limited, finite and rather fragile creatures – have a relationship with a transcendent, eternal God – whom we can't see or encounter directly...

This is why we need starting point examples, so that we can begin to understand something that is so beyond anything we know – through comparing it to something we do know...

So we start, and we begin to understand this God and who He is and what He is like largely based on what our relationship with our own fathers was, and is, like.

Now this can be problematic in two ways.

First, as many of you are probably already well aware, if our relationship with our father has been abusive, neglectful, distant, painful, or simply not there - then we have not been given a good starting point to begin to start to understand our relationship with God.

We will project all the faults and failings of our father on to God and that will shape whom we believe and understand Him to – wrongly of course... and so our relationship will suffer.

Secondly, even if our relationship with our fathers was good, it is only a starting point for understanding – there is so much more to our relationship with God than how we predominantly experienced our relationship with our father.

God is far more than a provider, he is far more than a fixer, he is far more than an encouraging coach... yet how do we learn and know more of who God is if we continue to relate to him only as we experienced our fathers – for good or bad... or worse if we are defining Him as we would like Him to be?

Friends, it is God's prerogative and God's alone to define Himself and reveal who He is to us.

We wouldn't put up with someone telling us who we are, insisting this is who we are supposed to be, how we are supposed to act, how we may express ourselves and so on – that goes against the very essence of what our tolerant society believes.

So why do we do this to God?

Now, let that question simmer on the back-burner in your mind for a bit – because it's time we consider what God thinks, and how He feels about His relationship with us.

So, as a starting point to help us begin to get our minds around this divine-human relationship from God's perspective - it can be helpful for us to consider the kinds of friend relationships which we have, and how we might feel about them.

So, allow me to present the following "friend types" courtesy of Stylecaster.com.

Let's start with the Acquaintance friend. "Wow, hey! So good to see you, we definitely need to get together sometime!"
Never gonna happen.

Then there's the Flakey friend. You know the one, indecisive, non-committal, if they make plans with you they are always extremely late or end up cancelling at the last minute.

Of course we all have that Perfect friend – perfect in the sense that nothing bad ever seems to happen to them — has a great family life and career, financially secure, stays in great shape

without having to work-out, you'd probably hate them if they didn't have such a great personality as well!

Then there is the Faux Friend or the Frenemy. This is a weird passive aggressive friend who is not a friend at all. They are cool to your face, but you also know for a fact that they say nasty things behind your back, try to undermine you, and would sell you out in a minute if it would put them ahead.

And we all know about the friend who is the Mooch friend. They love to hang out with you, mostly because they can get a ride, borrow your tools, eat your food, let you pick up the bill, but they never offer to return the favor.

And finally the friend we all want to have, the Best Friend. That friend who gets you, understands you, has your back no matter what. The friend who shows up with their truck to help you move – again. They stick up for you when you're not around; they take your side in an argument, and would give you the shirt off their back if you needed it.

Now truth be told friends... if we are reflecting on our the kind of relationships our friends have with us, to give us a starting point for understanding how God might understand and describe our relationship with Him - we can say that God wants us to relate to Him as a Best Friend, but the reality is that we relate to Him otherwise.

Now since you're in church this morning – I would assume you're not a Faux-friend of God... but you never know... lots of people go to church on Sunday but turn into different people when they are back at work or school on Monday.

And how often have we mooched off of God? We'll take the sunshine and the rain and the good blessings God gives, but when it comes to giving back or going through hard times? Ah... not so much.

Or maybe we come across as the Perfect friend to God, because we assume God must be impressed with how we seem to have everything all together, and how nice and kind and good we are...

So, you see how this reflection exercise is working so far this morning friends?

On one side we're considering how we understand our relationship to God, and on the other side we're considering how we can understand how God views our relationship to Him – using our relationships with fathers and friends as starting points for this understanding.

And we can gain some good starting insights in understanding both sides of the relationship – but at some point we need to go beyond what we can understand from comparisons with father and friend; and that is where – finally - Psalm 139 comes in.

Friends in Psalm 139 we see that David has an understanding of his relationship with God that goes far beyond what he had with his father; good or bad, and that in turn allows him to understand and express what it means to relate to God – as a faithful covenant partner.

So, Psalm 139 is a **personal** description of what it means to be in a Covenant relationship with God.

Now you may recall in our series on the Christ of the Covenants we relied up a very technical definition and understanding of a Covenant – to help us identify all the different covenant administrations that lead up to Jesus Christ.

And that definition said a covenant is a bond, of life and death, which is sovereignly administered – and this is a great definition of a covenant, but it's a bit difficult to relate to personally.

But the good news is that Psalm 139 is written to help us experience this technical definition of covenant in a much more personal way.

And David accomplishes this by reflecting how each part of the definition applies to him and then elaborating on it, all while using very personal language.

So let's start by looking how our relationship with God is "sovereignly administered."

First, notice how David says in vs. 1 "**you** have searched me Yahweh, and **you** know me" the emphasis here is on Yahweh's initiative – not I sought you God, and asked you to search me and I shared some things about myself with you...

Second, in vs. 2-4 David reflects on Yahweh's omniscience – Yahweh's ability to know all things – even David's private actions, his thoughts, and what he is going to say before he even says it...

Third, in vs. 7-12 David reflects on Yahweh's omnipresence – Yahweh's ability to be everywhere through His Spirit. There is nowhere David can go where Yahweh is not – high, low, near, far... even what seems to be opposite to God – like darkness – cannot keep the presence of God away from David.

Forth, in vs. 13 David reflects on how Yahweh has created him – with deliberation, skill and consideration, David was fearfully

and wonderfully made... and further more David proclaims in vs. 16 that Yahweh has determined all of his days ahead of time, they were written out before one of them came to be.

So how does David respond to this "sovereign administration" of his relationship with God?

Vs. 6 "*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.*" In other words David bows in humility acknowledging his limitations as a creature before the sovereignty of his Creator.

So right here we begin to see how our relationship with God goes much further than what we have with our fathers... we may honor our fathers, respect our fathers, but we only bow in worship before our Creator – and that may be something new for us...

Next, we have the "life and death" part of the covenant definition.

Now we've already seen how David makes the life part very personal by acknowledging that his life was created and purposed by Yahweh in vs. 13-16, and the death part shows up in vs. 19 where David appeals to God to slay the wicked – those who are bloodthirsty and speak of Yahweh with evil intent, who oppose God and misuse his name.

And we remember that a covenant relationship contains blessings for faithfulness but curses and consequences for unfaithfulness – and ultimately covenant unfaithfulness results in death.

We think back to what God said to Adam and Eve in the Covenant of Creation, regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – the day you eat of it, you will surely die.

And again we are reminded – rather soberly - of how our relationship with God goes so much farther than how we experience our relationship with our fathers, as God in his sovereignty has the right to judge our if covenant faithfulness

is done out of gratitude for his blessings or if he allows us to experience the consequences for unfaithfulness.

Now it's important to note here that David does not find Yahweh's sovereignty, or the life and death aspects of a covenant relationship to be off-putting.

I know that for many people today, it is difficult to accept these aspects as foundational to properly understanding our relationship with God, but David embraces them.

Instead of finding them troublesome, he sees them as reassurances of the final part of the covenant definition - the Bond - that God has with him and that he has with God.

David finds security and confidence in the life and death nature of our relationship with the sovereign Yahweh, and we see David responding to who Yahweh is in this capacity with fierce loyalty and unwavering love.

Psalm 139 describes the kind of covenant partner that God is looking for – that loyal best friend if you will.

David says “how precious to me are your thoughts, your purposes.” In other words what is most important to David is what is most important to God.

And through requesting that God slay the wicked, David expresses the extent of his fierce loyalty to Yahweh. Vs. 21-22
“Do I not hate those who hate you, Yahweh, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?”

So friends, remember what God said to Satan in Genesis 3:15? He said *“I will put enmity:[hatred, discord, animosity etc...] between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers...”*

So when David says in vs 22. *“I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies”* He is confessing that he belongs to offspring of Eve, that he wants nothing to do with the offspring of that ancient serpent who instigated the first

rebellion against God, and continues to encourage rebellion against Yahweh. If you are against Yahweh, you are against David and He is against you.

This is how David personally experiences the Bond that he has with Yahweh in a covenant relationship.

And in this we see the kind of partnership that God is seeking from each of us, and how it goes far beyond what we might understand from what we’ve experienced in how friends relate to us – both good and bad, because only Yahweh has the right to expect our loyalty to such a degree.

Now as always – we ask the question, how does this Psalm lead us to Jesus Christ?

And the answer for Psalm 139 lies in vs. 23-24 where David invites Yahweh to search him, to find any offensive way in him and lead him in the way everlasting.

I'm hoping that we are now so familiar with the whole dynamic of how we each fall short in covenant faithfulness – and David was no exception – and how Jesus Christ comes in as the faithful covenant partner on our behalf that we can see right away how Psalm 139 points us to Jesus Christ as the way everlasting.

Because today friends I'm feeling lead to remind us that we need Jesus Christ to be that faithful covenant partner on our behalf – so that we are able to have that covenant relationship with Yahweh – the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We need to be connected to Jesus, so that Jesus connects us to God - this God who awesome is all His sovereignty and life and death power – this God whom we confess Jesus himself to be in His divinity!

And we so commonly relate to Jesus and to God through the familiarity of the friends and fathers whom we know - that we forget how awesome and transcendent, beyond us and set apart from His creation God truly is.

And this morning as we've looked at Psalm 139 – my prayer is that the Holy Spirit gives us a renewed appreciation for the holiness and awesomeness of God.

And then with that renewed sense of awe and wonder we will increase in our love and appreciation for what Jesus actually did in becoming one of us and emptying himself of what it means to be God.

And so friends I encourage you to echo David's closing words of Psalm 139 this morning to triune God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; “see if there is any offensive way in me God, in how I understand my relationship with you – point it out to us so that we might correctly understand and respond to what it means to be in a Covenant relationship with our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier - Amen.