

Our Father, Part I

Talk by Paul DeCelles

I'd like to talk today about our Father. It's awkward to talk about him, because it's hard to know what to call him. I could say that I want to talk about God, but that doesn't quite capture what's on my mind. I want to talk about the First Person of the Trinity. I could refer to him as St. Paul often does, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rm. 15:6, 2 Cor. 1:3, 11:31, Ep. 1:3) or more simply as Jesus does after the resurrection, "my Father and your Father, my God and your God" (Jn. 20:17). I plan to refer to him a lot in this talk and I just don't think it will work to be constantly repeating, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" or even "my Father and your Father."

So how shall I refer to him? The Father? Our Father? Father? Dad? "The Father" doesn't seem quite right. Can you imagine Pat and Tim Pingel talking about Ed and saying, "The father is going to watch the game tonight"? It doesn't quite capture the father-son reality nor the reality of their brotherhood. Besides, referring to "my Father and your Father" as "the Father" seems to remove him from the scene. It's as if he isn't an actor in what's going on. "Our Father" is better, but again, can you imagine Pat saying to Tim, "What's our father doing tonight?" and Tim responding, "Our father is watching the game." I think they are more likely to say, "What's Dad doing tonight?" and "Dad's watching the game." I'm not, however, going to refer to "my Father and your Father" as "Dad". It just doesn't work. "Father" is better, but it's also unnatural for us at this point.

Most often I'll refer to him as "our Father" because at least that emphasizes our brotherhood and our union with Jesus, the firstborn of many brethren. But don't get hung up on language and spend the rest of the day thinking about that.

I. STRUCTURE OF THE TALKS

As I've said, the topic this afternoon is our Father. So where do we begin? With Jesus, of course.

- John 5:19: The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise."

So, if you want to get a picture of the Father, look at the Son.

- John 14:24. "The word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me."

What Jesus is saying here is this, “He who listens to me is listening to the Father. My word is the Father’s word.” Jesus really is saying, “The Father and I are one.”

We begin with what Jesus did and what he said, because his works and his words are our Father’s. I want to warn you. This method is pretty radical. When talking about our Father, most people don’t begin with what Jesus did and said. They begin with philosophical descriptions of God: he is omnipotent or omniscient, for example. That’s not what I’m going to do. I think you’ll agree with me, though, that my method is a good one. After all,

- John said, “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (Jn. 1:18).
- Paul said Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). So, look at Jesus in order to see the invisible God.
- And as you all know, Jesus himself said to Philip, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9).

II. JESUS DEALING WITH FREEDOM

Now, I want to talk about Jesus, but we’re looking at Jesus to see the Father. Don’t lose track. I’m talking about the Father, but I’m going to talk about Jesus. If you look at Jesus, you see the Father.

Both Kerry and Craig have talked about freedom. Freedom is a fact of life. It’s a reality and you can see in the gospels that it’s a reality that Jesus dealt with. (That is to say, it’s a reality that the Father is dealing with. If you see Jesus dealing with reality, you see the Father dealing with reality. That’s the way the Father deals with reality.) Perhaps the most poignant example is the story of the rich young man.

- Mark 10:17: And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: “Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.” And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth.” And Jesus looking upon him loved him and said to him, “You lack one thing; go sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven: and come follow me.” At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

“And Jesus looking upon him loved him.” Imagine the moment. The invitation hangs in the air. Jesus is helpless to determine the outcome. Jesus knew **the rich young man** was free. He knew he would do what he wanted to do. There was nothing he could do to cause **that young man** to accept what he was offering—his life, the very life of God. Maybe Jesus could have tried to persuade the man with long arguments or maybe he could have tried to sway him by a moving declaration of his hopes and dreams for him, but he didn’t. Because Jesus loved the rich young man, he wasn’t going to try to control him—overpowering him with persuasive words or smothering affection. He wanted a disciple, not a hireling.

Let me read you another passage:

- Luke 19:41-44: And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, “Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! but now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

Jesus was sent by the Father to his own people, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He was trying to save Jerusalem from destruction. He did everything he could. He did mighty works for them to see. He taught them in parables in order to get under their radar and prick their hearts. He tried meeting Jerusalem’s leaders on their own ground, by engaging them in legal arguments. He tried giving them strong rebukes. Nothing worked. They just became more and more hostile. They took offense at Jesus. They didn’t like what he was doing—healing on the Sabbath, eating with tax-collectors and sinners, healing Gentiles, casting out demons. And they certainly disagreed with what he was saying—making himself out to be God’s Son, for instance. Jesus made them mad. He didn’t fit into their preconceived categories of what the Messiah should do and say. His best wasn’t good enough for them.

Jesus wanted to save Jerusalem, but the outcome of his mission was in the people’s hands. His mission to Jerusalem was going to be a triumph or a tragedy depending on how the people responded. By the time Jesus enters Jerusalem, he can see the handwriting on the wall and so he weeps. His desires for Jerusalem are going to be frustrated.

If you look at the Gospels carefully, you can see that throughout his ministry Jesus is dealing with the reality of people’s freedom. Jesus had something in mind for his first miracle—we don’t know what. All we know is that he changed his mind because of an encounter with his mother. They are at a wedding feast in Cana and the wine gives out. Mary, his mother, says to him, “They have no wine,” and Jesus says, “O woman, what

have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” Despite his original reluctance do anything, Jesus turns the water into wine. Matthew tells a somewhat similar story (Mt. 15:21ff). Jesus and his disciples have retired to the region of Tyre and Sidon. It doesn’t look like Jesus plans on doing any miracles while he is there, but one Canaanite woman is so persistent and full of faith that Jesus relents.

Here’s another example of Jesus changing his plans on account of what another person does. Early on in his public ministry (Mk. 1:21ff), Jesus goes to Capernaum. He preaches in the synagogue on the Sabbath, he delivers a man with an unclean spirit, heals Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever. That evening, after the sun goes down, the town brings him their sick.

Isn’t that interesting? The people bring their sick to Jesus when the sun goes down, which means after the Sabbath is over. They are playing it safe, but Jesus doesn’t hold that against them. He heals them anyway.

Jesus heals their sick and the next day the people are looking for him again. But he tells Peter, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out.” It looks like Jesus has a plan. He wants to go from town to town throughout Galilee. It looks like that is what he did—at least until he had an encounter with a certain leper. The leper came to him, begging him, “If you will, you can make me clean.” Mark says that Jesus was moved with pity and healed him. Then Jesus “sternly charged him” to say nothing to anyone. But the leper “went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.” (Mk. 1:45). Because of his encounter with that leper—you could say, because of his encounter with that leper’s freedom Jesus had to change his modus operandi. Instead of going from town to town, he now had to stay in the countryside.

At one point while he was wandering around Galilee, Jesus gets into a boat and goes across the Sea of Galilee into the country of the Gerasenes (Mk. 5:1ff). It looks like he is making a foray into new territory. When he gets out of the boat the first person he meets is a demoniac. This guy lived among the tombs “and no one could bind him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart and the fetters he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones.” This guy was quite the phenomenon. Everyone in the neighborhood must have known him. People in the nearby village probably often heard him as they went about their business. Jesus delivers the guy. When the people of the region came to see what is going on, they saw the demoniac sitting, clothed and in his right mind. The people were afraid. They heard about what happened and what did they do? They began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighborhood! Jesus begins to get back into the boat.

He has done the best he can. He's done everything he can, but the people closed the door to any further work on his part. And then something unexpected happens. The demoniac begs to go with him. Now this is very interesting. You can almost see the light bulb go on in Jesus' head. He couldn't make any headway with the people of the region, but this guy could! So he refuses the guy and instead says to him, "Go home to our friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." This time, on account of another's freedom, Jesus' mission is furthered.

That's not always the case, however. Jesus wants and needs help with his work, but he encounters a lot of excuses. People have family responsibilities and business responsibilities. "Let me go first and bury my Father." "Let me first say farewell to those at my home". (Lk. 9) "I have bought a field and I must go and see it." "I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come" (Lk. 14).

So you can see, throughout his public ministry, Jesus is dealing with people's freedom. It's not like he has A PLAN; rather, he is always improvising, changing, going from plan A to plan B to plan C. He doesn't have a plan; rather, he is always planning. It's not as if he has a set course; it's not as if he is running down a bobsled run, moving inevitably toward the finish. What happens is not programmatic. What happens in the Gospels is shaped by each encounter along the way.

III. OTHERS HAVE POWER OVER JESUS

Again, when I say, "Jesus," think, "Father."

What else did Jesus do and say? What else can we say about him? He experiences anger, joy, compassion, sorrow, desire. This is very important to remember. It's not as if Jesus is walking through Galilee and Judea untouched by what is happening. He doesn't exist above the fray. He's chosen to enter into the fray. He isn't indifferent. What is happening around him matters to him.

When Jesus arrives at Lazarus's tomb in John 11, the RSV and NIV say he "was deeply moved." Actually that translation sugarcoats what the Greek actually says. The verb describing his reaction is *embrimaomai*, which refers to the snort of a warhorse or for humans an outburst of anger. "I WON'T PUT UP WITH THIS!" Can you see Jesus standing before the tomb, snorting like a warhorse, angry at what has happened to his friend?

As Jesus drew near the gate of a city called Nain, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. When Jesus saw her, he was moved with compassion and raised her son from the dead (Lk. 7:11ff). It wasn't, however, just the plight of individuals that stirred Jesus. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion

on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. His compassion again leads to action. He calls his disciples together, gives them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and authority to heal every disease, and then sends his disciples to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

When his disciples came back from their mission, telling Jesus about all they had accomplished, Jesus rejoices about what is happening. “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes” (Lk. 10:21). He’s really happy. This time it worked! He is filled with joy that his disciples are catching on and that they can join him in his mission. (Read, “Father.”)

And as we have already seen, he weeps over Jerusalem. It would have been easier if he could have walked through Galilee and Judea doing some good while remaining detached, always giving and never desiring anything in return. That is not, however, what was going on. Although all that Jesus gave to people was free, it’s not as if their response didn’t matter to him. In fact, it mattered very much. You can see this most clearly when Jesus speaks to his disciples at the Last Supper.

He’s longed for this moment. He has so much he wants to tell them and so much he wants to reveal to them. He’s had to hold back a lot, because of their limited capacity to understand and receive what he is saying. But now the moment is ripe for a further revelation. He doesn’t just want to do good to those he is speaking to. He desires something more. “Abide in me,” he says. “Let us become like a vine and its branches, with the same life coursing through our veins.” He desires even more than that. In John 17 it is as if he says, “Abide in us, the Father and I.” Jesus prays most earnestly that his disciples “may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us I in them and thou in me.” He yearns to live one life, the life of the Trinity, with his disciples. Of course, the fulfillment of his desire is dependent on his disciples. That’s the way love works. It’s amazing, shocking even. Because Jesus loves them, he gives his disciples a certain power over himself. It’s the power to make angry or make glad, to cause grief or joy, and ultimately, the power to frustrate or to fulfill his desire.

IV. JESUS GIVES ALL (Read, “Father.”)

Now I want to compose a couple of snapshots of Jesus’ ministry. The first is taken from Mark 1:21-37 and the second is from Matthew 14:12-34. I’m not going to read these passages. I just want to open your eyes to what Jesus’ life was like.

Mark 1. Jesus teaches in the synagogue, the people are astonished. He delivers a man from an unclean spirit, but not before the evil spirit makes a scene, crying out “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” Then he goes to Peter’s house and heals Peter’s mother-in-law.

Don't forget, this is Mark 1. We forget that there was a first time Jesus stood up and taught in a synagogue. There was a first time he performed a deliverance. There was the first time he healed someone. Mark is telling us about "the firsts." Can you imagine how tired Jesus must have been? Then at sundown they brought to him all who were possessed by demons. The whole city was gathered about the door. Not only did he cast out many demons, he also healed many who were sick. Mark doesn't tell what time after sundown they all left, but we do know that it was a short night. In the morning, a long time before dawn, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place to pray. He wasn't by himself for long. Peter and his buddies were looking for him, and when they found him Peter said, "Everyone is searching for you." His life was no longer his own.

It was Jesus' first experience of the crowds pressing in upon him demanding his time and his attention. It was the beginning of what was to become a way of life for him. Take for example, Matthew 14. Jesus hears about the gruesome death of John the Baptist. He withdraws by boat to a lonely place apart. But when the crowds realize what is happening, they follow him on foot, arriving at Jesus' destination before Jesus does. So imagine the scene: Jesus is grief-stricken. He wants to be alone, but when he pulls ashore he is greeted by a great throng. So what does he do? He rolls up his sleeves and gets to work, doing everything he can for them. He heals their sick. I wonder whether each time Jesus healed someone he felt power go out of him as he did when the woman with the hemorrhage touched his robe? If so, imagine how drained he must have been after healing everybody in the town. He fed them by multiplying the loaves and fish. Still, he wanted to be alone. Finally, he was able to dismiss the crowd and to send his disciples off in the boat. He went up the mountain to pray and what happens? He can see the boat on the water being beaten by the waves. The disciples are in trouble, so he goes to them, walking on the water. When he gets into the boat, the wind stops. They arrive at their destination and it all begins again, with the crowds bringing him their sick.

At one point in Mark's Gospel (Mk. 4.35), Mark describes Jesus asleep on a cushion in a storm-tossed boat. The storm is so bad that the disciples are afraid for their lives, but Jesus is asleep! It's no wonder he was able to sleep through a gale. He was utterly exhausted! (Read, "Father.") He was literally pouring himself out for his people. Besides pouring himself out healing and delivering people, he is teaching constantly. "For all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn. 15:15). It must have taken an enormous effort to communicate everything his Father taught him.

Jesus withholds nothing. He doesn't have a home and he's left his family. He's poor. I don't think Jesus was poor because he was following some ideal of poverty. I think that whenever he had a dime in his pocket he gave it away. He was poor because he was constantly giving. Jesus wasn't holding anything in reserve. Did he raise every widow's son? I doubt it. Did he heal every leper? Probably not. But you know what? He was doing the best he could. He was giving all.

Jesus was taking a tremendous risk. He was giving all, but all can be given in vain—any parent or any lover knows this risk. Jesus was keenly aware of this. Jerusalem looks like it isn't going to open its eyes—the future lies with the small band of disciples around Jesus. Jesus knows that. He's no fool – he can read the signs of the times. Still, he asks, in a very poignant moment: when the Son of Man comes (that is, when he is crucified and raised) will he find faith on earth? (Lk. 18:8). Will it all be for naught? Depending on the response of those around him, it was possible that his self-gift could be rejected. The work of salvation would have been at an end.

In fact, Judas does reject Jesus. There in the garden on the fateful night, Jesus was confronted with the tragic failure of his mission—his job was to save the world and he couldn't even hold together a band of twelve men. He'd been pouring out his life for three years and it looked like his mission was going to end in a tragic failure. He was at the end of his rope. What happens? Because he must, because the situation demands it, he finds more that he can give and more he can do. He can give his life. He can die, but he is not retreating. He goes after death and takes it captive. It's an incredibly bold, risky move. He still can't make people do what they don't want to do, but he can turn the tragedy of death into victory.

So let me summarize. Throughout his ministry, Jesus was dealing with the reality of people's freedom. He alters his plans on account of what other people do. He doesn't have a plan; rather, he is always planning. What happens in his public ministry is shaped by each encounter along the way. The outcome of his mission is in the people's hands. He is offering them life, but ultimately there is nothing he can do to cause people to accept what he is offering. He did the best he could. He did everything he could, but for some his best wasn't good enough.

What is happening all around Jesus matters to him. He isn't walking through Galilee detached, always giving and never desiring anything in return. He was always giving, and what he gave was free, but people's responses to him did matter. They mattered very much. Because Jesus loves them, he gives his disciples a certain power over himself. The fulfillment of his desire is in their hands.

His life was not his own. He was literally pouring himself out for his people. He was utterly exhausted. Jesus withheld nothing. He was doing the best he could. He was giving all. (Read, "Father.") He was taking a tremendous risk. Depending on the response of those around him, it was possible that his self-gift would be rejected. He gets to the end of his rope—when all seems for naught—he finds more he can give and more he can do. At the end of his rope, he finds his greatest victory.

OUR FATHER, PART II

Talk by Paul DeCelles

In the opening chapter of his Gospel John gives his reader a clue about how to read the Gospel he is writing. He says that no one has ever seen God, but that Jesus has made him known (Jn. 1:18). So what did St. John discover about our Father? For decades, he thought about what he had seen in Jesus. Finally he was able to boil it down to one sentence. God is love. Often, when we hear “God is love” we think about what that means for us. We think about what he has given us and how he has blessed us. Or we think about how we should be more like him and love more. This afternoon I want to reflect on what John’s revelation says about our Father.

I

Have you ever said of someone or heard someone say, “He’s a very controlling person?” Is it a compliment? No. Have you ever had someone try to control you? Is that love? No. Well, do you know what? The first PERSON of the Blessed Trinity—our Father—is not a controlling person. Isn’t that amazing? He’s in charge, no doubt about it, but he’s not a controlling person. You could say it this way. He doesn’t have a plan. Something even more wonderful is going on. Our Father is always planning. He’s got a goal—to unite all things in Christ—but he’s constantly improvising, constantly creating. Why? Because men are always making free choices and he’s working with the choices. He’s dealing with men’s freedom. He’s in the fray. Let me give you some examples.

Consider Adam and Eve for a moment. They are in the garden. It’s beautiful. They are holding some fruit in their hands, deciding whether or not to eat it. They know what our Father wants. “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Gn. 1:16), but it’s up to them. It’s their choice. That’s the way our Father created them—free. After all, they were created in his own image. That means they had the ability to love and there is no love without freedom. At that moment, the future was in their hands. The whole history of mankind was in their hands. What happens next is up to them. There are no guarantees with love. There is always a risk involved.

Jump forward a bit in Genesis to chapters 11 and 12. In Noah’s day, our Father considered blotting out mankind and all the animals from the face of the earth, but he decides instead to start over with Noah and his descendants. He keeps working with his creation. In Genesis 11, it’s clear that once again our Father doesn’t like what is happening. The men of earth choose to build a city and a tower with its top in the heavens in order to make a name for themselves. He deals with the situation and then begins something new. He’s

going to start working with a people, so he calls Abraham. Unlike Adam and Eve, Abraham says “yes” to what our Father has in mind. His “yes” opens up wonderful possibilities for our Father. But you know what? If he had said “no”, our Father would have dealt with that too.

Our Father is always dealing with new problems that appear on the horizon on account of human choices. He confronts the problem; he doesn't walk away from it.

Remember the time when the Israelites cried out for a king so that they could be like other nations? Our Father had told them that he was their king, but they wanted a king like all the other nations had. Our Father said they were rejecting him (1 Sm. 8:7), but nonetheless he told Samuel to go ahead and anoint them a king. Our Father didn't want them to have a king. Apparently he had something else in mind, but when his plan tragically runs aground on the rocks of their freedom, he stays with it. He uses the shipwreck as a staging ground for something new. One king of Israel, David, is destined to become the forefather of the Messiah. The angel Gabriel prophesies about Jesus, “the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David” (Lk. 1:32). The kings of Israel become part of the story.

At some point, however, our Father reaches what seems like a dead end. It looks like his hopes and his dreams for Israel are ending in tragic failure. In spite of everything he did, his people ended up in exile. It was their choice. He sent them many prophets. At a critical moment he sent them Jeremiah—never had there been a prophet quite like him — but they didn't believe him. His people had returned from exile, but things weren't going well. Our Father had done everything he could for them. He was at the end of his rope.

Don't be afraid of being at the end of your rope. That's the place where miracles happen.

When he's at the end of his rope, he finds even more to give. He says, “What shall I do? I will send my beloved Son; it may be they will respect him” (Lk. 20:13). I can hear him saying “It's the only way. Nothing is going to work right unless we make them one with us.” Of course, giving us his Son was an incredible risk.

We experienced something like this in the early days of the community. We were spending a lot of time, energy and money on training communities that were in relationship with us. We tried to tell them everything we knew about community-building, but it just wasn't working. Things didn't start working until they joined us. We grafted these communities onto us and they become us.

For some of you, perhaps, what I've been saying is pretty unnerving. Some of us might prefer a god in whom power exists apart from love, but there is no such god. If he exists, he exists only in our imaginations. So what's the foundation of our hope if our Father isn't operating according to a prepackaged program? Where does our security lie if our Father

takes risks and if there are moments when the future lies in our hands? Our security lies in the fact that there is nothing that is happening, that has happened or that will happen that our Father can't redeem. Don't be afraid. He's got incredible stamina. Furthermore, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus" and the love of God in Clem and the love of God in Rich and the love of God in Ralph. That's our hope.

II

Not only is our Father constantly working, but he's also full of passion and desire. You can see it in Jesus, but if you can't see it there, you can find it in the Old Testament. He experiences anger (Ex. 4:14, Nm. 11:1, Jg. 2:20), delight (Is. 62:5), compassion (Ex. 22:27), sorrow (Gn. 6:7, Hs. 6:4, Jr. 2:4) and desire. It's just amazing. Our Father is "a devouring fire, a jealous God" (Dt. 4:24). He wants to be the apple of our eye.

Have you noticed that I haven't mentioned fear? That's because there is no fear in love (1 Jn. 4:18).

Our Father is not untouched by what is happening. What is happening matters. It triggers delight or anger or compassion. He wants a response from us. He needs our love. If he doesn't have it, his desire will remain unfulfilled. He's always giving us good gifts and sustaining us—whether we respond to him or not—but he's also always desiring our response.

How can such a thing be? How can I say our Father needs our love? How can I say our Father lacks something? I think I can explain it. I heard about a family recently. They have 4 or 5 children, some boys, some girls, and they decided to adopt a 10-year-old Russian orphan. They didn't do so because they needed another child; they did it out of overflowing love. The family was a complete unit, but gradually they came to need the new child. Without him, the family was incomplete. If he was late for dinner, everyone got worried. He misbehaved a lot and it caused great anxiety. His goodness and his happiness became necessary to the family because they have begun to love him. In fact, he held in his hands the outcome of the family's love. It would end either in triumph or tragedy, depending on how he chose to respond. Out of overflowing love this family, once complete in itself, created its own need. So too with the Trinity. Out of overflowing love, it created its own need.

It's astounding. The fulfillment of our Father's desire depends on your free response! In a very real sense, your freedom controls God. He can't make you love him. He loves you and wants your love in return, but he can't buy your love and he won't overpower you with his. What does this mean? It means that our Father works quietly and unobtrusively. He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good. He sends rain on the just and the

unjust. He isn't just loving those who love him. He's giving his good gifts to everyone without concern for recognition, gratitude or any other kind of response. He works so silently and secretly that many people don't know that their life, health and strength, home, love and friendship come from him.

Now wait a minute, you might be thinking, didn't he just say our Father wants a response from us? He does. Our Father needs our response, but he does not and will not demand or compel a response from us. That's why he works so unobtrusively, but not so secretly that he can't be recognized.

Just because our Father is working unobtrusively doesn't mean he isn't working hard. Take creation, for instance. I read something a while ago that illustrates something of the work of our Father in creation. It's in a book by a pediatric neurosurgeon named Ben Carson (*The Big Picture*). He's describing a surgery he did in South Africa on Siamese twins. These two boys were joined at the top of their heads. He was keenly aware that the lives and futures of the two boys rested in his hands. The operation was preceded by months of careful planning. It was going to be an incredibly complex operation. Carson put it this way, "a normal human brain is perhaps the single most marvelous and complex piece in the great three-dimensional master puzzle of creation. When you press two such complex organs together, the problems of orientation are compounded almost beyond belief" (pg. 32). The operation began at 6:30 in the morning. It was a new, untried surgery. Rather early into the operation they came upon "a vascular area so complex that the veins looked like a huge tangled serving of spaghetti." Carson worked without his special operating microscope, without his micro-instruments and without his special operating chair with adjustable platforms to support and brace his arms and legs. He relied on his scalpel. The surgery lasted 25 hours. When it was over, he practically had to be led out of the operating room like a blind man. Although he was jubilant, he suffered a near paralyzing exhaustion.

That's what our Father looked like at the end of the sixth day of creation. He'd given his all. That's what love does. He was spent, drained. That's why he had to rest on the seventh day. He was exhausted!

I have another illustration of our Father's work. Chris Vieck told me this story about her father. She grew up on a large farm in southern Indiana. She was one of eleven children. Because the Viecks' house was right on the farm, she was lucky enough to have her father around a lot. When she was about thirteen years old, she began to wonder whether her father really loved her. He just didn't seem to be very interested in her feelings, and her feelings were, Chris says, practically her whole world at that age. One evening she and her mother were washing dishes. At the Viecks', the window above the kitchen sink looks out on all the farm buildings. You can see the Viecks working, going from barn to shed, from shed to the office. As she was washing dishes with her mother, she brought up her doubts

about her father's love. Her mother paused, looked out the kitchen window, and then said, "Oh no, your father would sweat blood for you kids. I'm not sure he hasn't already."

You know, some people say the whole universe is relatively insignificant compared to the greatness and grandeur of our Father. Some people say our Father probably made it with one hand tied behind his back, that it didn't cost him much. They are all wrong! It's not insignificant and it is costly. Our Father is pouring his whole self into it. He doesn't have a storehouse where he keeps extra unused supplies of power and glory. He isn't holding anything back. Remember, he is love, and love gives all. This world is the greatest masterpiece of all time and everything we do to it and with it is important activity. When we engineer it, when we clean it, when we study it, when we organize it, we are doing something immensely valuable.

Our Father is sparing nothing. He is giving all. He's doing everything he can. He's doing the best he can, but he experiences a lot of rebellion and hostility. People shake their fist at him, crying out "Is this the best you can do?" Well, it is the best he can do. He doesn't have anymore to give. If he did, he would.

So open your eyes! Look all around you. Don't shut your eyes when you pray. Don't try to escape what's happening around you. Our Father is doing all this! Give him the response he wants and needs. Recognize his work. Come to understand it. Praise him for it and give him your all in return.