

Our Loving Father

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

How are we meant to live this life? That's what we started to talk about last Sunday. How are we actually meant to live? That connects up with the other questions: What is the meaning of life? And why are we all here at all? Those of you who were here last Sunday remember that what we said was, our God who made us, is really closer to a good father than to anything else we know here on earth. And the relationship that he wants with us is the kind of relationship we would have with a good father.

Now, I understand that some of you had good moms and some of you had good dads. I understand that some of us did not have good dads and therefore we maybe have a little problem.... except that probably all of us know what a good father is like. I was glad and grateful that I had a dear dad. A good father is one who is older than you, who loves you more than he loves himself and who cares for you more than he cares for himself. He knows more than you and he is able to provide you with all that you need. He is the one that provides the food on the table that your mom serves. And he is the one that advises you when you begin to get into things that you don't know anything about.

Now, the only difference between that and God, is our dads reached that time when we were teenagers when they suddenly realized that they knew nothing and we knew everything. Then there came a time when we realized we didn't know everything. But there still came a time when we eventually went on and left our dads behind. We went on to other things and we had to start providing for ourselves.

Now, God is older than that. God is a dear Father that is permanently older than all of us here. He knows continuously until the end of time more than you know. He knows what you're going to get into and he knows what you should do in that thing. He has absolute infinite ability to provide you with all that you need. So, His desire in putting us here in this world was that we should trust Him like a Father. That is, we should love Him. We should depend on His love. We should trust Him to provide for us what we needed and to guide us in what we were to do in our lives. His will was that there should be an intuitive trust between Him and us -- a loving thing, a warm, friendly thing. He is like our dads.

You know the joke as the millionaire's wife turns around to the millionaire and says, "Things, things, things, you don't love me, myself. You just give me things." Well, we all know that a dad likes to give us things but most of all what we like about him is that he loves us. And what he likes most about us is that we were able to sit on his knee at one time and talk with him. Or later on we were able to sit beside him and talk with him. And even when it was his last days in bed, we were able to sit by his bedside and talk to him. That's the dearest thing to a real dad.

You are the dearest thing to a real dad. Not the things he gives you, not the things you do, but you yourself. A real father loves you to be with him. That's why he loves you. He loves you because he enjoys being with you, that's God. God made you to be with Him forever. He loves you. He really loves you. He likes you. He wants to be with you forever. That's why he made you like Himself. Let's look at Genesis 1:26 at the beginning of the Bible. We've formalized these verses so that the truth has almost been filtered out of them.

Genesis 1:26, "Then God said let us make man", and of course that tells you that he wasn't on his own. Jesus was with him and he turned around to Jesus and said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air." That's why God made you and me like him because He wanted us to be with him forever and to live with him forever. In order to live with somebody forever and be their friend forever, you have to be like them. I have joked about my little Yorkshire Terrier and how he was great at playing ball but wasn't great at discussing Beethoven's Fifth or discussing predestination. You can't discuss with some lesser form of life something that is dear to you. You need to have someone who is like you and that's why God made us in his image. He made us like himself.

So you are like God. You're different. You're not just a better form of animal. You're different. Might I just remind you too that you are the only one like you? I know that's startling but you are the only one like you in the world today. You're the only one like you that has ever been in the world and you're the only one like you that will ever be in the world so you have a unique relationship to your maker. He made you in his image in a way that he has made none of the rest of us in his image. And if you are lost, there will be something permanently lost to Him. But he made us in his image. He made us like himself. And he made us to live dependent on his love.

Now one of the things that came out in the piece that Gentry read was that one of the capacities he gave us was spirit capacity. He gave us a spirit capacity and that's actually how he relates to us. You see that if you look at it in
1 Corinthians 2:9.

1 Corinthians 2:9-10. "But as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him. God has revealed to us through... Einstein.' No. 'God has revealed us through... degrees.' No. 'God has revealed to us through...our university education.' No. 'God has revealed us through...simultaneous equations.' No. 'God has revealed to us through the Spirit.'"

So, God made us like himself with a spirit like His so that He could communicate His love to us through our spirits. So that's what we said last Sunday. God's love is the way we're meant to live. We're meant to live dependent on His love. We're meant to receive that love through his Spirit who communicates that love through our spirits. That's the way God intended us to operate.

Your spirit is the inside part of you. It's the real YOU. We say, "I like that guy's spirit." We mean that we like the real person that that guy is. "I like him, himself." Your spirit is you, yourself. It's the innermost part of you. It's who you really are. What a man is when he is alone that he is and nothing else. That's it. What you are when you're alone, that's your spirit. God made you with a spirit.

Now, if you look back to the record of the creation, God gave us other capacities besides a spirit. You find it there in Genesis 2 where it expressed in Hebrew. Those of you who know Hebrew know it's very literal, mathematical in a way. It's an exact language compared with a language like Greek or even like English. So, the terminology tends to be then very metaphorical and physical but the meaning is still there in it.

Genesis 2:7, "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground." The Hebrew word for dust is 'aphar' and the Hebrew word for ground is 'adamah' which is Adam. It's actually where Adam got his

name. So God made us first from the dust of the ground. If someone like me buries you, certainly in the old country, I would take earth and throw it onto your casket. I'd say, "Dust to dust, earth to earth, ashes to ashes." Because our bodies here are just made of earth and when they go, they're nothing.

I remember being a little set back and sensitive when it was my own dad. In Ireland, we don't have an open casket in a funeral parlor. We have the casket at home. We have it open just for a short time and then close it. I remember before closing it, my wife who was a dentist, saw that I was still thinking that was Dad. She pushed his head and I said "Oh, don't push his head." But really it's just a head. If you've seen a dead person, the first thing you say to yourself after the life has gone out is, "That's not my dad. My dad is not there, my mom is not there." You just know it. Once the spirit has gone from the body, it's just earth. It's just dust, it's nothing. It isn't the person.

Now God made us with a body and that's the outside part of us. It's from the dust, from the earth. You see then in verse 7, the second step in creation. "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." I shared last Sunday that the word for breath in Hebrew is 'ruwach' or 'pneuma' in Greek. Ruwach means breath or wind or spirit which ties up with Jesus saying, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and you know not know where it comes or where it goes." So is the spirit.

The spirit is like wind. The same word is used for both. God breathed into us His spirit. He breathed into us His spirit life. He put spirit into our bodies and then a third thing resulted. It's like putting instant coffee into water. You take the water, you take the powder, you put it into the water and a third substance results. That's what the Bible says, "and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being." The King James Version is a more accurate translation of the Hebrew word, which is 'nephesh'.

Man became a living 'nephesh'. 'Nephesh' is soul. Our soul was created. Our soul is the result of the combination of God's spirit with our bodies. That's the way the Father made us. We actually exist on three levels. We have a spirit and then around the spirit is our soul and around our soul is our body. It may help some of you to foresee some of the things that we'll begin to say if I mention to you that soul is from the Greek word 'psuche'. In Anglo-Saxon the 'U' becomes a 'Y' in the consonantal changes and becomes 'psyche'. The word for soul is psyche. Psychological is 'logos psyche', the system of thinking about the soul. So it might help you to realize that when you talk of the soul, you're talking about the psychological part of you.

You can immediately see of course that there's a complete difference between the psychological part of you and the spirit part of you. That's where we confuse ourselves continually in Christian faith. We keep talking about the psychological part as if it's the spirit. The spirit is the spirit. The psychological part of us is just the soul and maybe we'll share a little towards the end of today what the soul involves. But God's will was that we should live off his love. We should live from the inside out. We should live from our spirits through our souls, through our bodies. We should know him as our dearest friend, as our dearest dad, and we should trust in him completely. We should listen to him.

Do you know what Einstein actually said? He said, "All ideas come from God." He was one of the greatest geniuses of our era and he said, "All ideas come from God." The greatest minds (including Plato's) however little they understood about Jesus, sensed that things come from outside us. They

come from above. They come from the Creator himself. God meant us to live that way. That's the way he meant us to operate.

In other words, he meant us to receive everything through his love. Now, of course love provides everything you need. When somebody loves you, you just feel important. You do. You feel you are something. You feel you mean something to somebody. You feel you're worth something. You have no trouble with self-esteem. You have no trouble with self-worth. You've no trouble with significance. You have no trouble with other people walking over the top of you, if you have somebody that really loves you with all his heart. That just settles your whole problem of self-worth and significance.

It's the same with security. You know with your dad, you did not worry about whether you'd get your lunch next day when you were five-year-old. You didn't trouble about it. You knew your dad was going to take care of it or your mom was going to take care of it. When somebody loves you, it settles the whole issue of where you're going to get your next meal, where you're going to get your clothes, and where you're going to get your shelter. All your food, shelter and clothing are taken care of. The whole issue of security is taken care of when you know in your heart that somebody loves you who is well able to provide those things.

It's the same with happiness. When are we really happy? Well I might say when I first rode the BSA motorcycle at 90 miles an hour down an Irish road. You'd tell about when you first water skied. We'd all joke about that, but finally after all is said and done, we're happiest when we're with somebody that loves us and that we love. That's it. We get all our happiness really from relationships and that's the way God meant us to live. He meant us to live like this.

He meant us to get all our happiness and all our security and all our significance from just our relationship to him. That's the way he intended us to live. One of the results of that would be that we'd be giving OUT; we'd be living OUT all the time. There are different advantages of this. God, for instance, knew where the gold was in California. He intended us through the intuition of our spirits to know that.

In fact, it could be argued that all real improvements that we've made including things like DNA come from out of the sky. Except that God did not mean us to live only in extraordinary moments like that. He meant us to live like that all the time. The Father knows how you should live. The Lord knows what job he made you to do. The Father knows whom you should marry. The Lord knows where you should live and you don't need to go through all kinds of tricks to get the information.

You didn't go through all kinds of tricks with your own dad. If you were wondering where you should apply for a job you didn't say, "Okay dad, I don't want to ask you this question but instead I want to put a fleece out. Are you looking for this fleece? If you step on the cracks in the pavement, then I'll take this job. If you don't step on the cracks in the sidewalk, I'll take this other step." You didn't do that, you just asked. You got close to him, talked it over with him, and spent time with him so that you knew the kind of wisdom that he had. That's what you do with God.

God wants you to operate that way. If we operated that way, there wouldn't be the oil spills on the Santa Barbara coast, there wouldn't be the little seagulls dying with all that tar on them. There wouldn't be the slums in Tokyo. There wouldn't be all the messes that we've made of our world by trial and error. God intends us to live in closeness to Himself. I don't know how many wrong turns you have taken in your life. I don't know how many times you have wandered back and forward. Would you stop? Your dear Father knows and he will reveal to you and he will show you.

You don't need to do all kinds of tricks. You don't need to go, "Aaaah, yes, I'll just open the Bible, pick a verse and say that's God's pick." That's an insult to the dear Lord. You don't do that with your dad. You didn't take His letters, point to something and say, "Oh that's the job." That's not right. That's making fun of God.

This is His dear Word and by reading this Word, studying it and asking His Spirit to reveal it to you, you get to know God. You don't get a little promise book here. You get to know God. That's what Jesus said, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life. It is they that bear witness to me. But you will not come to me that you might have life." God wants us to live in love with him, depending on him for these things. That was his will, loved ones, and that is his will for you today.

Now, we are foolish, miserable and rebellious human beings and we resolve not to do that. That's what God wanted us to do. You see it back in Genesis 2:9.

Genesis 2:9 - "And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden." That's another word for the spirit, another word for God's love. It's the tree of life. It was presented in Hebrew language physically like a tree because that's the way men understood in those days. But it's the spirit. It's God's love and his life.

He wanted us to live by his life, moment by moment by his life. We are not to live trying to foresee what is going to happen next week. That was the whole message of the manna in the Old Testament -- if you gathered more manna than you would eat for one day it went bad. We have lots of rotten manna in our banks, in our homes and everywhere. We have all kinds of manna that we've gathered to try to ensure that we'll be okay down the road. God wanted us to live dependent on his life and so He put the tree of life also there. But he also put beside it, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Why? He put it there because the Father wants us to be free.

The Father wants us to be free. Heaven is not going to be a room where the Lord God and his machine guns sits back and says, "You've got to stay here, you've got to love me." That's not God. God wants real love and so he made us with capacities like himself. But he said, "My attributes and characteristics, my own nature you have to choose to receive through choosing my friendship and choosing to depend upon me. If you do that, then my spirit will flow through you and will begin to fill you with security and happiness and significance. But most of all, I will fill you with my own nature and my own character so that you're going to enjoy yourselves in heaven forever. But you must choose to do that."

He gave us free will. We decided no. Well, you can see what Eve said in Genesis 3 or what Satan persuaded her to see in Genesis 3:6.

Genesis 3:6. "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate." Because this is the very beginning of mankind's childhood, it was presented to man in that way.

The woman looked at the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and said, "Look, if I just observe how Adam was told by God to prune that tree and I write it down and list all the precedents for how to

live life here on earth, then I will be like God. That's what He wanted me to be. I'll be like God but without depending on Him. I'll be like God by using my own knowledge of what is good and what is evil. I'll decide it's good to prune this tree at this time of the year. It's bad to dam up that river at this time of the year. It's good to do this; it's bad to do that. I'll fill my life up with what is good and I'll avoid the evil. I'll do the good and I'll be like God but by my own power because I can see that this is good for food. I'll get all the food I need from this world. I'll wrestle it out of this world by my own strength and power. I'll get all the delight for my eyes that I want. I'll get all the happiness I want and I'll use my head so that I become wise and am able to manipulate other people and get myself into a position of importance in other people's eyes." And that was what we did.

We actually substituted the world for God. We determined that instead of depending on God and having to trust him, we will just depend on the love of the world and we'll wring out of it what God offered us through his love. You know it so well -- the security we get from things. Everybody here who has tried to build up the stocks and shares, every one of you who have tried to argue a higher salary, every one of you who wonder why you bought a fourth coat when you already have three, every one of you who has changed the car earlier than you needed to, you know the story.

We try to surround ourselves with enough things to make us feel that we are untouchable even if the economy goes down the drain. We surround ourselves with things. We try to get from things security. It's agony -- we can't do it. It's impossible. Because of course what we need is not security. What we need is love. We need love in our spirits but we don't have it.

We feel lost in our souls. We feel nobody cares about us. We feel we're not important to anybody. We feel we'll go out like a light at the end and nobody will know we've even been here. And so we feel unloved. Like all of us who have trouble with lack of love we try to make up for that lack by such things as eating. We all do the same. We try to get the things that love would give us. We try to get security by getting more and more things. That's why it's "a tale told by an idiot". It's a life of futility. It doesn't matter how many things you get, you can't create a feeling of love or being loved in yourself. That's why we say "things, things, things" but what we want is not things, it's love.

It's the same with this whole business of significance. We all have our ways to do it. We try to will our husbands or to will our wives into thinking "We're important. We're the king on the throne." Or we try to will our secretaries or our fellow workers into that. Or we try to turn conversations around so that we appear to be very clever and very wise. The other person will look up to us and realize how important we are and will somehow give us a sense of value because we know we're not valuable at all. The only thing that makes us valuable is that we're our Father's child. And we're only valuable because He knows we're valuable. But when we lose that, we can never find value so we keep on grinding people into the ground.

You know how often in conversation you have played what you thought was a very diplomatic game. You know how you turn it around to what you're brilliant at.

You are brilliant at talking about white tailed Cockatoos, so you bring the conversation around to white tailed Cockatoos. The other person isn't interested in it at all, but you think you can make a little mark with it. So we're dominated all the time by this desire to make ourselves important in other people's eyes.

Of course, it leads to slavery because the other side of that coin is fear of other people. You have

fear of what others think of you, fear of their opinion, and fear of their lack of approval of you. So you end up turned into a little robot because things dominate you. You become dominated by what people think of you and you become dominated by their source of happiness because we have no happiness.

We're bored with life and we want to make it exciting. So we buy boats, we buy cars, we buy bikes, we buy furniture, we buy houses, and we try to go on vacations. We'll do anything. We try to get a fun job. We do anything to try to get happiness. We even use people to try to get happiness. We use sex and drugs to get happiness. We use relationships to try to get happiness. We suck in from even our husbands and wives whatever we feel we need to get happiness. We actually become dominated by the world. Then what happens to us is we find that there's nothing in there at all. There's nothing.

This dear spirit inside us seems dead and cold. It's not anything. It doesn't exist. We come to church and try to sense something. We try to feel something. We feel something in the soul but we can't sense anything in our spirits. We think if we had more rousing hymns or better songs - but all we do is "feel" more. We're still trying to feel things. We're still trying to find happiness at this level and the dear spirit is dead. That's what it means to be dead in our sins. You've heard of the comment "he's dead from the neck up". Well, most of us are dead from the neck up.

Most of us are just little souls in bodies. That's what the Bible says in Ephesians 2. It's an interesting verse and summarizes very precisely the way most of us in the world live. It's Ephesians 2:3.

"Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh." That's what the flesh is -- living dependent on the world. Flesh is not my squashy fat parts. It's not sex. Flesh is living dependent on the world. "Among these, we all once lived in the passions of our flesh." Passions -- because we're driven. We're driven people and passions are what drive most people. They aren't free people they are driven robots.

"Following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Not children of God, but by nature we became children of wrath, following the desires of body and mind. You'll see next day that the mind is part of the soul. Most of us are just little animals. Actually if you're honest, most of us are dead from there up.

You get up in the morning and think, "Do I feel good? No, I taste bad. Am I going to have a good day? Well, it's kind of dull. Do I feel any pains that I didn't feel before? Oh, but there's something good for breakfast!" We're like little puppies aren't we? Then as it gets cold we say, "Oh it's cold I don't feel so good. Or, the car is good and feels like it's going well today." Or, we get to the office and notice if they smile at us or don't smile. If they smile we wag our tails like little puppies and we say, "Oh that's good."

We tend to live physical body lives utterly dominated from our bodies. We're dominated from the things we can get. If we can have a little treat at lunchtime then it lifts our day. So we're dominated by our bodies. A few like Einstein maybe lifts into this level, lifts into the level of the soul, a few very cerebral people might live by the thought or the mind and some of us live very strongly by our emotions but on the whole, we live body and soul lives.

Of course you see the other problem. The whole thing is perverted. The whole nature becomes perverted. It was meant to operate like that. [Pastor is pointing to a diagram of body, soul and

spirit.] The spirit was meant to give to the soul, the soul was meant to give to the body and the body to fill the world with God's love. It's corrupted and perverted completely. They're now all working in reverse. The body dominates the soul and the soul can't dominate the spirit so the spirit just dies.

So that's what it means to be a fallen man or a fallen woman. That's what it means when we say we have the nature of fallen men or fallen women. That's what it means when we say we have a sinful nature. It's not that you're a great gambler - though you may be a great gambler. It's not great that you're a terrible fornicator - though you might be a terrible fornicator. Sinful means that your whole nature, your whole personality is working the wrong way around. It's working in reverse. This is why you have troubles when you start trying to live the way God wants you to.

That's why a Savior is needed. That's why you have such frustration when you try to change this around by 'do-it-yourself' books or self-improvement books or following better principles. It doesn't matter. All the principles are here but the nature is now perverted. There actually comes a point of conflict where this direction meets that direction and becomes a conflict in your life where you cry, "The good that I would I cannot do and the evil I hate is the very thing I do." Next Sunday, I just look forward to sharing with you what God did for us in regard to that. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for being our Father. We apologize to you for the way we have ignored you and regarded you just as God somewhere up there and not treated you as dearer to us than our own fathers. We apologize Lord for the way we have run our lives by the seat of our pants, running our lives by what we thought was good and what we thought was evil. Father, we know it isn't enough to apologize to you, we have to repent of the pain that we have caused you by doing this and the insults that we have offered to your own face. Father we repent. We tell you we are sorry, heartily sorry for these sins and for these attitudes. Father we intend to turn from them.

Lord we ask you to reveal to us what you've done about these sinful natures of ours. Father we ask you to be with us this coming week and enable us to begin to live the way you intended, meeting you each morning as our dear Father and beginning to be dominated by you and walk in the spirit and after the spirit not after the flesh, instead of being dominated by the world of men and things and circumstances. We ask this in Jesus' name and for his sake.

And now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and evermore. Amen.