

## **How important is Freedom to you?**

**Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins - June 17, 2018**

**Today is Father's Day and all over America there will be fathers receiving honor from their children and just as many perhaps that the day will go by unnoticed by their offspring. The Bible says to "honor your fathers and your mothers that your days may be long upon the earth in the land that the LORD is giving to you". Exodus 20:12.**

**God places an awesome responsibility upon fathers to train their children in the way they should go and when they get old, they will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6.**

**Today I want to speak about Father/child relationships according to the Scriptures and in particular Ephesians 6:4 that reads like this: "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Provoke as used in this passage suggests a repeated, ongoing pattern of treatment that gradually builds up a deep-seated resentment that boils over in outward hostility.**

**Some parents suppress freedom by overprotecting their children. A child that is not allowed to make choices is at a disadvantage as they get older. God gave us a free will and there are appropriate times that parents must step in and protect their children, and times that they must release them to learn life's lessons on accountability and responsibility. Children need careful guidance and certain restrictions, but they are individual human beings in their own right and they need guidance on how to make wise decisions and then be allowed to follow through on their own. Their wills should be guided by love and instruction rather than by an overpowering control by a parent.**

**In the Scriptures, there is a wonderful story of a father who, although he knew the outcome of granting his son's request, honored the request and allowed the son to experience the consequences of that choice. The father in the story represents our heavenly Father, a perfect role model for us because he loved us so much that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16. He will never refuse to accept a truly repentant person who comes to him. The story of the Prodigal Son is a story of God's redemptive grace and mercy. It is also an illustration of God's love and forgiveness. God seeks out sinners in order to restore them to himself. See Luke 15:11. John 6:37 says that all that the Father gives to him will come to him and those who come to him will never be driven away.**

**In the story of the prodigal son, the youngest son approached his father and asked to be given his share of his father's inheritance. In the Jewish culture this was unheard of since in essence it was like saying "I wish you were dead." A son that did such a thing would be punished either by stoning or would be disinherited. Yet in this story, the father gave his son a third of all that he had and gave the rest to his older son as was specified in the law (See Deuteronomy 21:17). Not long after he received his portion, the younger son headed out down the road to debauchery. He wanted to experience life without the restrictions of working in the family business or building a successful career. He wanted freedom! He**

found friends in a far country to help him reach his goal of a good time and it wasn't long before he was broke and his friends had vanished. To complicate matters, a famine had hit the land and things were tough for the citizens of that country. When the youth reached in his pocket for the last time, there was nothing in it for him to provide for himself even a morsel of food. He began to be in want and tried to find a job that would provide for his basic needs. A citizen of that country sent him out in the field to feed his pigs and he was so desperate, that he took the job. He wasn't given anything by anyone and he ended up eating the pig's food to keep from starving. When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will arise and go back to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men." So he got up and went to his father.

For the first time in his life, he saw the reality of what he had lost by being self-centered and focusing on worldly pleasures rather than being a productive participant in building up his father's estate that would eventually provide security for both his brother and himself.

He finally realized what kind of character his father was when he was forced by a foreigner to sleep and eat with the pigs in order to survive for no one cared for him. His father was a faithful man; he appreciated his hired help and paid them generously. He and his brother had never known what it was like to be without shelter, food or clothing. Their father was a wonderful provider. They had more than they needed to survive. The lad put the pieces together in his mind and he knew his father to be a fair, loving, kind man and although he knew he didn't deserve to be called a son for he had spurned that love and protection of his father, he was willing to be a servant just to be accepted back into the security of that household. He expected to be punished and was willing to take what he deserved in exchange for a safe environment.

He returned to his father without anything to offer, not even clothes on his back or sandals for his feet, yet the father received him with joy and celebration. The son felt unworthy and remorseful and had come to the end of himself for he was in dire straits. The father, as God the Father, showed his unconditional love by accepting him back into the family. In fact the father was watching and waiting for his son to return. When the son was afar off, the father recognized him and ran to meet him, embracing him and welcoming him back home. The Jews considered this highly undignified in their culture. The patriarch never ran or never made the first move in such a situation. John 6:44 shows us that our heavenly father seeks us and calls us to himself and he is the initiator. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

We have the freedom to accept Jesus Christ or to reject him. He will not force his will on us. We must choose to either follow him or to follow our own desires. The eldest son was angry that his brother was given a party and celebration upon his return. He was

ashamed of his brother and wasn't even willing to enter the house to welcome him home. His father tried to reason with him by telling him that everything he had belonged to him and it was the right thing to do to celebrate and be glad for his son was dead and now is alive again; he was lost and now was found.

The pursuit is relentless, it is effectual and it is with great intensity that God the Father seeks those to whom will be His children for now and forever. And God never gives up this pursuit. The Bible emphasizes:

There is no one that seeks God (Romans 3:11)

Our Salvation does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. (Romans 9:16).

Jesus said, "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand." John 10:29

Paul stated, "Ephesians 1:4-8 reads like this: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

Perhaps he is pursuing you now. If you feel him calling you, don't harden your heart but turn from the path you are travelling and follow after Jesus Christ.

Salvation doesn't come by works; it is by the grace of God. Many people try to earn their way into heaven with good works, but that is not the door into the kingdom. We must turn from sin, accept Christ into our hearts and receive his love, mercy and forgiveness that we can produce good works from a dedicated life to our heavenly Father.

I pray that you will understand that God loves you and wants to guide you into the path of life and into his eternal kingdom. Won't you trust him as your father today?

Jesus' way is freedom! He promises to set you free from the bondage of sin and death and offers you living water that will satisfy your soul. True freedom comes by following his will and experiencing love, joy, peace, long suffering, meekness, temperance and self-control. This is the fruit of the spirit and it is being offered to you when you accept the conditions of giving up your will and yielding to the Holy Spirit. Jesus sent him to lead us and guide us into all truth! It is a path of peace and the Bible says, "Many are called but few are chosen." He chooses those who are willing to be obedient to his word. The Psalmist said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path." Psalms 119:105.