The Good Father God

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[0:00] Death is beaten and the enemy's back is broken and we are free. Because you have freed us on the cross and in your resurrection.! And we thank you. Amen.

! Friends, do you grab your seats. My name is Tim. I'm part of the team here. And we're just going to spend a little bit of time in the Word of God, as we do every Sunday, just to see what He would say to us.
And we've just heard from six people that they met God. That His name was Jesus and He changed their lives.
And what I'd like to think about this morning is, okay, that they said they met God. Some of them even use those words. Anna said, I had an encounter with Jesus. Like, I met Him. How does that work?
Or to put it differently, how do you talk to God? We'll get into that in a moment. I'm very aware that we're...
[1:04] This will make some of you laugh. We're running slightly early. Who knew? It's not how I was expecting this morning to go. It's rare that you say, Tim, please preach longer.

That's not what we're going to be aiming for. But still. But what a wonderful morning. Doesn't it just make your heart burn to see people plunged into water and pulled out and think, that is a new life. Died with Christ and raised with Him. These are six people who are like, I'm all in with Jesus. It's wonderful. It's wonderful. That can be you too. Particularly if you're kind of someone who's just here, kind of looking in.
Maybe you've come, family or friends. You're like, I'm not sure about all this. You can meet Him. I'm going to try and explore this morning, particularly through a text in the Bible. Who... How do we talk to God?
What is He like? What does Jesus tell us God is like? But the point of saying this is that you can meet Him too. So how do you talk to Him?
[2:07] We'll see in a minute how Jesus answers that question. But I suspect if we're honest, we'll just wait and ask people on the street. How would you talk to God? What kind of...

What is He like? You'd get quite a variety of answers. They wouldn't use these words. But some people would talk about Him like He's some kind of genie. You know, you rub the lamp, you make your wish, He does the thing.
We pray because we want Him to do a thing. We talk to Him because we want Him to do a thing. Maybe you have to get the incantation right. We'll rub the lamp just right first. But He'll do a thing. Others, I think, probably approach God to talk to you like He's some kind of harsh manager or mean teacher. Like you come with the expectation of punishment.
You're like, I kind of come in thinking He's going to be mean. And the main thing I'm saying is don't punish me. I wonder if others would approach God like He's kind of a cheerleader.
[3:07] Like what He does is stand behind you going, whoa, well done, all the time. And kind of bigs you up and makes you feel good about yourself. And I imagine there are plenty who think, well, if I'm honest, if I talk to Him at all, it's like a blank wall.

Just I speak and then nothing happens. And Jesus says something different. We've been preaching through the Gospel of Matthew here at Harvest Church this term.
And I'm going to read the next passage that we've got to. But it tells us who Jesus said God is and what He's like when we talk to Him. Because He does not say that He is a genie or a harsh manager or a cheerleader or a blank wall.
He says something different. Let me read you some of His words. And just pay attention to how does He describe God. So I'm reading from Matthew 6. He's giving some teaching about a number

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of different things.
But how does He describe God? Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them. For then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.
[4:18] Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they've received their reward.

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father, who it sees in secret, will reward you.
And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they've received their reward.
But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.
Don't be like them. For your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.
[5:20] Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces, that their fasting may be seen by others.
Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others, but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
This is the word of the Lord. What's Jesus saying? Well, he talks about three different things. I want to focus on one of them. He talks about three things that mark out those who follow him. First, he talks about the way they give them money.
And if you're not part of the church, if you look around you, you will see lots of people who give something like the tenth of their income in order to support everything that we do and to give to the poor. Jesus says that his followers, they treat their food differently.
[6:31] They deliberately give it up at times to seek God. They fast. And they're particularly set out in how they talk to God. And that's the one I want to focus on. So Jesus says God is not a genie.

God is not a harsh manager or a harsh teacher. He is not a cheerleader. And he is not a blank wall. God's a father. So he says over and over again, God is a father.
And in this room, we will have a variety of experiences of our earthly fathers, good and bad, I'm sure. And all of us end up having to grapple with the way that our parents have inevitably failed us. But God is a perfect father. So he's not like the genie where you have to summon him. You have to figure out the incantation or rub the lamp just right or say the right words.
He's not like that. He's a father. He's present. He's there. He wants to talk to you. He's there before you are. He's not like a harsh manager where it's almost like you have to earn a hearing.
[7:41] You know, you have to kind of come in and you have to have done your work well enough for them to listen to the requests that you're making. And they're like, have you met your quota? He's not like that. Instead, you're a child when you talk to him.

And a good father, they're present with their child and they want to listen to them. You don't have to kind of earn your way in to hear or to ask.
Father welcomes a child because they're their child. They want to know what they have to say. He's not like a cheerleader. Now, a father does cheer, right?
At the time, we just did some cheering for these children of the Lord. A father cheers. He's excited when his child does well or tries. But a father has authority.
And sometimes a father will say no. Sometimes they'll say stop that. Achille doesn't do that. So God is more than that. He is a father who will sometimes say that.
[8:42] That is not good for you. We need you to do something else. And if he's a father, then he's not like a blank wall, even if that is your experience. Jesus is saying God is there and you can talk

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to him.

God is a father. Think about it like this. Little toddler comes in to see his dad. He's been doing, or he or she, little toddler, they've been doing some drawing.
And they present their dad with their drawing. And they are clearly quite excited about it. You know how little toddlers are. They've worked hard on this thing. And they've given it to their dad. And their dad picks it up.
And he looks at it. And he has that moment in his heart where he thinks, oh no. I don't know what it is. Because he really wants to engage with his child.
And sort of be like, oh, what a wonderful drawing of whatever it is they've done. But frankly, it's a mess of scribble. And it doesn't know. But he tries his best to express joy in the thing that his children have.
[9:51] He doesn't say, you'll never make an artist. I appreciate some fathers might be like that. But a good father doesn't say, you're never going to be Monet. You might make Picasso. Look at all the scribble.

Like, he doesn't do that. He's like, oh, well, well done. Thank you so much. He's delighted by it. In fact, maybe he goes and puts it on the fridge. And maybe a really good father gets so excited by the scribble on the fridge that when his mates come around for a drink later on, he goes, look what my kid did.
And all his mates are like, are you mad? It's scribble. He's like, they're going to be an artist. Look what they did for me. Like, he's delighted by the scribble.
And you might think, to some extent, sure, that's what dads are like. What I'm telling you is that a good father, a perfect father, loves the scribble. So when God, excuse me, when Jesus says God is a father, he means that the way that God relates to us is that he, the thing that you do that you've tried hard at, but frankly, he puts it on his fridge.
That's how he wants to behave towards you. He's like, look what my kid did. Look at this. Look at the scribble. That's how God loves us. Like a father who loves his kid's scribble.
[11:10] And our, kind of the story we're telling you today is if you're not already a child of the most high God, you can become one. As we've just heard six stories of people who have become children of the most high God by trusting in what Jesus has done for them.

Jesus says we pray to God as father. He starts when he prays, our father in heaven. And then when Jesus is teaching them to pray, he moves on.
And he says that when we pray to our father, when we talk to him, we ask him to help us. He gives two examples when he's praying.
He says, give us this day our daily bread. So give me something to eat. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Protect me from bad things. Feed me and protect me.
That's what dads do, right? That's what parents do. Feed me and protect me. Jesus says when we pray, when we talk to our father, when we pray to him, we say help us.
[12:14] But because he's a father, he helps us in a different way than we might imagine God does. So he's not like the genie. Because how does the genie help you?

Well, you get the lamp and you rub it and then you wish for the thing and then, ha ha, the thing appears. You say, I would like a sports car. Ding. And then whatever the rules are, but you get your sports car.
You go to your dad and say, dad, can I have a sports car? He laughs at you. But he puts food on the table. Right? He gives you what you need.
He is unlikely, I suppose occasionally it might happen, but he is unlikely to get you the sports car. But he is going to make sure you can eat. When we pray to God to help us, that's what he's like. It's not like, oh, I'm going to give you your list of desires. But it's like, no, I'll give you your daily bread. I'll give you what you need. And when we ask him to help us, he's not like the harsh manager.
[13:16] Or the harsh teacher. Where you kind of like, well, they might do the thing that I want if I prove that I deserve help. Like, I've hit my sales quota.

I've done all my homework. I've done whatever. And then maybe they'll give me the thing that I'm asking for. So I'm going to work really, really hard for a couple of weeks. So that they might just give me the thing that day off.

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It's not like that. You don't have to prove you deserve help. Because he's a father. And a good father doesn't think his child needs to prove that they deserve bread on the table or protection from evil.
A good father thinks, you're my child. You need bread. And I need to protect you. You don't have to prove it. You don't have to earn it. Just give him. And Jesus says, that's what God's like.
And so that's how we talk to him. Like someone who we don't have to prove. We don't have to earn. And he's not like the cheerleader.
[14:20] Because you think, well, the cheerleader is going to help me, right? They're going to jump up and down and do the thing that I want them to do. The Lord helps. But he helps on his terms. Earlier in the prayer, Jesus taught his disciples.

He says, praying to God, he says, your will be done. And the implication, not mine. Not necessarily the things that I want. His terms, not ours.
If you like, dad knows best. Which if we're talking about a grown adult man, the small toddler, is true, right? The toddler will want things that are not good for them. Because they don't know any different.
And the dad is going to protect them by saying no on occasion. That's a good father. But he's going to make sure that they're safe. And he's going to make sure that they've got bread. And he's not like the blank wall.
You ask the blank wall for help. Nothing's coming back. But he gives bread, not nothing.
[15:27] God is a father who gives us what we need. Imagine it like this. Picture a king. A king is in a kind of opulent court.

All gold and jewels and rich, expensive stuff. He's a very powerful king. And he's got all the servants around him who... It's just a little bit scared of him. Because he's a very powerful king. And they've got that sort of like, I need to approach carefully.
Maybe I bow a bit as I come in. And I'm not going to bother him with a small thing. Don't bother the powerful king unless you've got a good reason to.
Because gosh, who knows what might happen. They're in kind of awe when they give him honour.
And then imagine it's the night and the king is sleeping.
And what servant is going to be brave enough to wake him up? Presumably, it'd have to be something really bad, right? To wake up the powerful king. Don't want to be angry with you. Wake up the powerful kingdom of the night.
[16:26] This is like we're being invaded sort of territory. It's like bad, bad things. But who is allowed, even welcomed, to wake up the great, powerful, slightly scary king in the middle of the night and say, could you get me a glass of water?

So I'd be a mad servant to do that, right? But his kid, his little toddler, of course you can come and wake up your dad and say, Dad, can I...
Very articulate, toddler. But Daddy, can I have a glass of water, please? The king is going to be like, yes. And what Jesus is saying is, is God a great and powerful king who rules over all things?
Sure, yes. He's already alluded to that in the prayer, your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.
Does he have the power to do anything he wants? Yes. Would it be once it's been reasonable to have a little bit of trepidation about going towards him?
Maybe, but not if you're his child. You can go and wake him up in the middle of the night, and God doesn't sleep, but go with the analogy. Wake him up in the middle of the night and get a glass of water.
[17:37] That's how he says we should talk to him. He wants to hear from us. So Jesus says God is our father.

Jesus says when we talk to him, we should ask him to help us. And Jesus says when we pray to him, we should ask our father to forgive us. He says forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.
So there are things that we might need to be forgiven for. Jesus is saying we might have, that we will have, some form of debt towards our father.
In fact, Jesus at this point in the story of Matthew's gospel is teaching, but the way the story goes, as many of us will know, is that he eventually is hung on a beam of wood across to die.
And the Bible tells us that is to pay the price of our debt. It's to free us from debt towards God. The Bible often calls it sin.

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[18:54] And that what's offered to us, what we've heard six different examples of, and then seen it acting out as people have got into the water and been plunged down and pulled out again, what's offered to us is that we can have free forgiveness if we trust in the fact that Jesus' death on the cross pays our debt.

And we can rise with him too into a new debt-free life. I wonder if anyone here has ever been, had their debts, or just even paid off a debt.
It's like paying off a debt. It's quite a good feeling, right? You had a debt, you pay it off, you're like, oh, I did that, I'm free, how good. But I imagine many less of us, probably not many at all, have had a debt cancelled.
Well, it's not that you've worked hard and figured it out and managed to pay the thing back and that feels good. It's that you owed a lot of money and then it's gone. You didn't pay it back. That's what Jesus is saying we should ask the Father for and expect that he will give it.
Cancelled debt. And that is very different to those other views of God. The genie, well, you don't, the genie just does what you want, right?
[20:18] I mean, there's rules and you get your three wishes or whatever, but he does what you want. The Father, instead, is saying, oh, no, no, no, you've wronged me. There is some measure of debt.

There is something that you have done which has hurt me and is wrong. And I guess, well, we don't like talking or thinking about it, but if we're honest with ourselves and not talking to anyone else, all of us can see within ourselves things that are, that probably don't meet our own standards, frankly, let alone if we read the Bible and discover that God's standards are higher than that.
Like, we don't really match up to the way we would prefer to live our lives. We're not talking about it. We're not entirely sure if we'd admit it to someone else, but inside, I suspect, we have a sense of that.
Jesus is saying that we do have a debt to this Father. We do need him to forgive us. The analogy breaks a little bit, but perhaps a little. Like the child, they've done something wrong.
Now, you don't tend to think of that in terms of debt, but certainly there is a form of punishment required in order to help them live right. God is saying something stronger than that.
[21:35] He's saying, actually, the way that we have lived, what the Bible calls sin, breaks our ability to relate to him like a father. Like, it ruins it.

And that we keep living like this. We're kind of, it's like we get turned in on ourselves and we're not able to look up and out anymore and chewed up and it gets worse and worse and worse with time. He's saying, that can be fixed. That can be broken. That can be healed. That debt can be repaid. It needs forgiving.
And funnily enough, all you have to do is ask him to forgive you. And then you start to follow him and then that is hard in lots of ways.
You've heard some of what they might look like in the passage I read, but all you've got to do is ask. All you've got to do is trust.
[22:33] That's kind of, when the Bible talks about faith, that's kind of what it means. Trust that Jesus on the cross paid your debt. Because we're not like the genie. We do need forgiving. But he's also not like that harsh manager.

Because that harsh manager, you'd imagine, you've got some debts that come in with their performance review or school teachers that come in with their report and it's like, fail, fail, fail, fail. Even the things that you're like, well that one was fair, but I tried really hard on this one. A fail. It's like, I think I just about made it on that one. Fail. Fail. Fail. And the harsh manager might not actually be wrong about the heart of our hearts, but God is not like that.
Not because he doesn't think that we did wrong, but because he goes, yeah, sure, terrible performance review. Oh well, just pop it in the bin. It's cancelled. You trust him, your bad performance review is gone.
Your debt is gone. It's like, gone. But I'm still the same person. He's all the same wrong thing. Yeah. So come and learn to live differently, but it's gone. That's what, did you notice Amy saying that in her testimony?
[23:39] She said, well I kind of got some of the same problems. Yeah, of course yeah, all six of them have. But, but because of the freedom that we get in the gospel, you'd learn slowly to live differently. And there's an opportunity to grow into that over time.

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But that bad performance review from all those things you might have done wrong, gone. That debt, gone. It's gone in the bin. But he's also not like that cheerleader because the cheerleader would just say, you're fine.
Everything's fine. You're wonderful. All you really need is to be told that you don't love yourself enough. You're great. It's like, no, you need your debt forgiving. It's like, the Lord will stand behind you and tell you, you're loved.
I'm for you. I like you. He will tell you that because he does. But you need your debt forgiving. And he's not like that wall.
It's just blank. He's throwing, nothing comes back. Because we might feel like we've been shouting into the void, perhaps. perhaps. But what the Bible tells us, what particularly the story of Jesus tells us, is that our shouting into the void is answered in Jesus.
[24:50] Because we're like, nothing came back. He's like, he literally did. the story is, in fact, the truest story that's ever happened, historical fact, is that God, in his infinite wisdom, sent his only son, Jesus the Christ, to come to a world of people who hate him and want to do everything they can to live differently to how he would teach them in order to rescue them and draw them back into relationship and friendship with him.

That's the story. So like, it doesn't, it's like nothing's coming back. It's like he's already come. Stepped into our pain in order to reach out to us.
And then died in our place so that we don't have to. That's what, the debt ultimately leads to death. Jesus died in our place. And then rose to glorious life as a historical fact so that we too can rise to life with him.
All of that because God is a father who runs to meet us and forgive us our wrongs. He loves you. I wonder if you know that. He loves you. What I'm going to do now is I'd like to pray the Lord's Prayer. I've written it into just slightly more modern language.
[26:15] It doesn't capture all of it. But I'd like to pray that and you can kind of pray it along with me in your hearts if you'd like to. And it may be that there are some here but after you come to watch someone will be baptized or a friend or family member and you're like, I don't know about all this.

I'm not sure that I can say that God is my father. It can become that right now. And this because it's a version of the Lord's Prayer there's a bit in the middle that says forgive me my debts.
And if you've not prayed that before what I'm going to ask you to do after the meeting is come and talk to me a little bit and you too can meet Jesus in much the same way that we heard Anna and others talk about.
You can meet Jesus. So I'm going to pray this and I'm going to ask you perhaps if we could all shut our eyes so you can decide in your hearts whether you're praying along or not.
Dad without limits make your name great. I want people to see you as holy.
[27:26] I want your rule and reign to come. I want your desires to happen in my life and in the place I live just like in heaven.

Please give me what I need for today. Please forgive me all my debts to you. as I learn to forgive those who have debts to me too.
Keep me from being tempted to do wrong. Keep me from being tested. Rescue me from evil.
Amen. Amen. Like I say if that's the first time that you have prayed that I'd love to talk to you afterwards. What we're going to do now is the band are going to come and a few minutes we'll sing some songs and the band are just starting to go oh no because I was expecting to have 10 minutes less than this to fill.
So we'll not we'll sing a couple of songs. They may not have prepped more. I'm not quite sure what will happen then. That's okay because we have had a wonderful morning worshipping the Lord and sing some baptisms and we might see what God wants to do with us for 10 minutes or so.
[28:50] But God is a father and he loves you and he wants you and he likes you and he always will and he wants us to talk to him.

He wants us to say help us. Help me. He wants us to say forgive me and he wants us to learn to live and walk in his way. He's for us.
What we're going to do in just a second when the band are ready we'll sing a song of worship to Jesus. While we do that we're going to ask and we'll see you next time and we'll see you next time and we'll see you next time in the next week.

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