

God's A Dad, Too!

“Dear friends, we are already God’s children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.” I John 3:2 New Living Translation

That’s an amazing concept ... the Creator is also a father!

Although who He is far surpasses our ability to grasp, at one level He’s a dad - a role that is familiar to all of us. I have difficulty wrapping my mind around his omnipotence. I can’t begin to understand his omniscience. His wisdom, sovereignty and holiness are attributes beyond my reasoning ability.

But I get ‘father.’

Often one of the primary difficulties we have with coming to grips with a Heavenly Father is that many of our earthly fathers didn’t measure up to Him by comparison. Some of them abused us, ignored us, limited us, loved us conditionally or even walked out on us.

Overlaying their inadequacies over God's perfect father's heart gives a distorted view of God as a parent. Every quality of his fathering is absolute perfection. He loves unconditionally. His patience goes on and on and on. He builds us up. He sets careful parameters around our lives to protect us. And when we fall, He picks us up and encourages us to go on. When we fail and acknowledge that failure, He forgives and gives us the tools to live righteously.

It's hard to imagine this indescribable God as our father. But He is. And He takes great joy in that role. When John writes in I John 5:19 that "*We know that we are children of God ...*" *NIV* it smacks of a theological knowledge. We have been told that we are God's children and we tuck that information away in one of the drawers where we keep our theology. But we seldom comprehend the application of that news.

As Solomon declares in Proverbs 10:1 "*A wise child brings joy to a father;*" *New Living Translation*. God takes great delight in his children. He is especially thankful for obedience and honor from them. When any child responds to parental care and instruction and does it quickly and with a good attitude ... a parent's heart swells with pride and appreciation.

And God is no different. He isn't asking for perfection, but for hearts of gratitude and love toward him as He endeavors to lead them through life to his plans for them. However, some of his kids break his heart. With stubborn determination to do life 'their

way' they ignore his guidance and willfully turn from his chosen path. Sin and rebellion always bring pain to a parent.

God transparently tells the story of his pain in the fathering of Israel. Yes, He had trouble with his kids, too. There's a poignant soliloquy by a grieving father in Hosea chapter eleven, verses one through eight. Listen to God's heart in this passage:

"When Israel was only a child, I loved him. I called out, 'My son!'—called him out of Egypt. But when others called him, he ran off and left me. He worshiped the popular sex gods, he played at religion with toy gods. Still, I stuck with him. I led Ephraim. I rescued him from human bondage, But he never acknowledged my help, never admitted that I was the one pulling his wagon, that I lifted him, like a baby, to my cheek, that I bent down to feed him. Now he wants to go back to Egypt or go over to Assyria— anything but return to me! That's why his cities are unsafe—the murder rate skyrockets and every plan to improve things falls to pieces. My people are hell-bent on leaving me. They pray to god Baal for help. He doesn't lift a finger to help them. But how can I give up on you, Ephraim? How can I turn you loose, Israel? How can I leave you to be ruined like Admah, devastated like luckless Zeboim? I can't bear to even think such thoughts. My insides churn in protest. And so I'm not going to act on my anger. I'm not going to destroy Ephraim. And why? Because I am God and not a human. I'm The Holy One and I'm here—in your very midst." Hosea 11:1-8 The Message

Look at the incredible paternal qualities that God exhibits here. Allow me to speak to dads primarily here ... ladies, your role will be examined later.

First, his love started early: (*When Israel was only a child, I loved him.*) He didn't wait until the early nurturing was finished and his son was able to throw a football or go camping.

We forget that nurturing needs both a mother and a father. Mothers may nurture more instinctively and it's certainly a role that women generally do exceptionally well. But a father's touch, kind voice and strong hands are vital investments in his baby's early months and years. There is nothing quite as astonishingly manly as a tiny baby held by a father's strong arms.

Second, notice his proclamation over this child: (*I called out, 'My son!'*) He is not labeled as a 'mama's boy' but as 'my son.' That ownership right from the start is what many men are still looking for long after their fathers are gone. A baby notices whether there's a dad as well as a mom in its young awareness. And a father proud of his son or daughter when they do little else than eat and eliminate and coo and cry, is likely to be the father whose pride is carried through every phase of his child's life.

The third quality shows up after some disappointing behavior of the child. They have turned away from early teaching. The call of the world has stolen not only their attention, but their heart as well. This can be 'easy quitting time' for some dads. Their hurt turns to anger. They say things they don't mean because they don't know what's expected of them at a time like this. But God did.

"Still, I stuck with him" He declares. To be able to keep parameters set and principles in place and still love and reach out when those principles are being ignored and the parameters mocked, takes all the strength of character that a father has. God has already gone through those troubled waters and He didn't give up. He is able to give you the grace and courage to keep loving and reaching out as well.

The fourth quality He exhibited in this passage is: *"I lifted him, like a baby, to my cheek ... I*

bent down to feed him.” This comes after behavior bound to break a parent’s heart. After getting his child out of a trap, rescuing him from his poor choices, there is no shown appreciation. He does not admit the role his father played in salvaging his young life. He doesn’t acknowledge that his dad is figuratively ‘pulling his wagon.’ And still, the father picks him up, brings him to his cheek and proceeds to feed him. Staggering patience; unexplainable love and commitment.

Next we witness a bad situation somehow become even worse. Waywardness becomes a life-style. New gods are found and worshipped. The world system now controls the actions and future of this stubborn son. The father sees where it is heading. This is where a ‘less-than-Godly’ father declares, “Okay. You made your bed, now lie in it! I’ve done all I can and so I give you up to the life you seem determined to live.”

But not this dad. *“I can’t bear to even think such thoughts. My insides churn in protest.”* This is where parenting not only is not fun anymore, but carries with it an almost unbearable weight. The load feels crushing. How much easier it would be to wash your hands of the whole mess and put it out of your mind. But the mind and heart don’t always run parallel. Even if the mind can forget, the heart doesn’t. There is a pain that simply won’t go away. But a godly parent draws love from a deep, deep well. Through the pain, in spite of circumstances, they keep loving and praying and believing and hoping.

This father stays the course. He takes his fathering role very seriously. He’s in it for the duration. You may see brokenness on the outside. There may be tears visible. The shoulders may slump under the onslaught. But inside is love ... incredible love and the commitment to keep loving.

Oh yes, God is a father, too. And he shows us how to be a parent in not only happy times when the pictures come out of the wallet, but during times of agonizing waiting for wrongs to turn right again. He's a Father we can emulate and draw strength from.

In our next chapter we take a moment to consider how God has always viewed children in our lives.