

Fatherly Love

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April 23 & 24, 2016

The Father Loves You

1 John 3:1-3

There's no doubt that there is a crisis in America today surrounding the issue of fathering. We have all kinds of fathers.

All Kinds of Fathers

Absent fathers

The statistics are bleak concerning kids growing up in fatherless homes.

- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes – 5 times the average
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes – 32 times the average
- 85% of all children who show behavior disorders are from fatherless homes – 20 times the average
- 71% of all high school dropouts are from fatherless homes – 9 times the average

Now there are lots of reasons why a father may be absent from their homes. The issue of mass incarceration in America has certainly played a part in removing many dads from their homes. The loss of social stigma about having children out of wedlock has contributed to children growing up without dads. No fault divorce has contributed. There are lots of factors playing into the problem of absent fathers.

But I think that almost everyone is in touch with the desperate need of children for father. Let us despair if our children or we ourselves were raised in a fatherless home. Now, there are some incredible exceptions to the bleak picture that I just painted. President Barack Obama was born in 1961 to a teenage mom and a Kenyan father who was already secretly married to another woman. He had almost no contact with his father throughout his childhood. The biological father of President Bill Clinton died in an auto accident before President Clinton was born. President George Washington was only 10 when his father died, causing him to end his own formal education.

A majority of US Presidents, in the first 50 years of our country, were fatherless children as was many of the philosophers who have deeply influenced our world. Confucius, Plato, Aristotle, Mohammad, all were fatherless for most of their childhood. LeBron James was raised without his dad. So was the most decorated Olympian in Olympic history, swimmer Michael Phelps.

The point is, not having a father does not consign any particular individual to a lifetime of failure. But it is a risk factor.

There's also the problem today, especially in the media, of

Incompetent fathers

If you're as old as I am, you've seen the media turn away from great fathers like:

Picture of Ward Cleaver

The father in *Leave it to Beaver* who always offered wise advice and consistent discipline to Wally and the Beaver.

And then there was Mike Brady, the father on the Brady Bunch

Picture of Mike Brady

He was able to handle six children, including three adopted girls, a wife, a dog and a career as an architect – all the while wearing plaid pants.

And James Avery, the father on The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air

Picture of James Avery

One of television's great dads, who combined heart, humor and an awesome sweater collection.

But in the 1990's there was a decided turn away from great fathers in the media to the inept, bumbling, doofus dads. The most obvious example was Homer Simpson.

Picture of Homer Simpson

He is ever the fount of parenting wisdom. Here is some of Homer's parenting wisdom. He says to one of his kids:

"You tried your best and you failed miserably. The lesson is: never try!"

"Kids are the best; you can teach them to hate the things you hate. And they practically raise themselves, what with the internet and all."

Or this bit of wisdom. Homer's sitting in a bar and he says,

“Well, it’s 1:00am. Better go home and spend some quality time with the kids.”

I wish that incompetent, bumbling, inept dads were just a media creation. Sadly, if you look at the Bible, there is almost no example of an ideal father in the entire Old Testament. King David is an inattentive father who refused to protect his daughter, Tamar, or discipline his son. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were all guilty of showing favoritism to one of their kids. They were also guilty of modeling a life of deception. Eli refused to discipline his sons. Noah is portrayed as a drunken, bumbling father.

It’s hard to think of a really clear example of a great dad in the whole Old Testament. And none of us had nor were any of us dads ideal fathers. What we have presented to us in the Bible instead, is a portrait of

A perfect Father

Who can redeem and heal anyone from the failures of absent fathers and incompetent fathers and emotionally detached fathers, and passive fathers and controlling fathers and narcissistic fathers and irresponsible fathers and perfectionist fathers and abusive fathers and any other fathering failure anyone can express.

Indeed, Jesus says that one of his primary missions on earth was to introduce to the human race the perfect ideal Father who would heal the father-wound that is in all of us because of less than perfect ideal fathers.

Here’s what we read in

John 14:8-9

8 Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’

9 Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”?’

In other words, Jesus says that his whole ministry was to reveal to us the Father that we’ve always longed for, the Father we’ve always desired.

We started a series here at Vineyard Columbus a few weeks ago titled “The Father Loves You”. Today, I want to speak simply about Fatherly Love.

Let’s pray.

1 John 3:1-3

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

John communicates the shock and the extraordinary privilege that believers in Christ have in being called the Children of God.

The incredible privilege of being called God's child

Being adopted into God's family and being called God's child, his son or his daughter, is the result of someone choosing to trust in Christ.

John 1:12 says

John 1:12

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God –

Likewise, we read in Galatians

Galatians 3:26

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith

The way we become sons and daughters of God is by choosing to trust in God's Son, Jesus Christ. Being a part of God's family, being adopted as a son or daughter is a privilege distinct from being born again. That is, being regenerated through faith.

One can imagine a world in which God made spiritually dead people spiritually alive; aware of his presence; able to worship him and receive him and, yet, not adopt those born again people into his family. Angels are spiritually alive, but they are not part of the family of God.

Adoption doesn't only go beyond being born again, being regenerated, adoption goes beyond being justified through faith. It's not hard to imagine a world in which God would set people in the right with him granting them a verdict over their lives as not guilty, without putting them into his family. Many judges in a criminal case might say about a defendant "You are not guilty". But that's a far cry from saying, "Oh, by the way, I want to adopt you and make you my son or my daughter."

Do you understand the incredible privilege of being called a child of God? Being adopted into God's family?

Let's look at this from the other direction. John is communicating the incredible privilege of calling God Father.

The incredible privilege of calling God, "Father"

Few other major religions in the world teaches their followers to call God, Father, other than Christianity. There is some talk about God as Father in the modern Baha'i faith. But in general, it is extraordinarily unusual to call God Father outside of Christianity. In Hinduism, despite the fact that there are tens of millions of gods, none is specifically called Father. And the supreme Creator and God-source, Brahma, is impersonal and never worshipped as Father. Islam has 99 noble names for Allah, but no mention of God as Father. In fact, there is a wonderful book written by a Muslim-background believer in Jesus titled:

Book: *I Dare To Call Him Father*

And this Muslim-background woman speaks about the extraordinary discovery that she made in life of being able to have such an intimate relationship with God through Jesus that she could now call God, Father. She described her whole conversion in terms of being able to call God, Father.

An important 20th century scholar, Joachim Jeremias, studied the Fatherhood of God in ancient Judaism. He looked through all of the literature, not only the Hebrew Bible that we call the Old Testament, but also the Talmudic writings, the writings of the rabbis, and every single major Jewish text that survived to the 20th century, to examine whether in ancient Judaism the title, Father, was attributed to God. And Jeremias' conclusion was that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible, or in any of the rabbinical writings could he find a Jewish person ever addressing God in prayer directly as Father. God in the Hebrew Bible was the Father of the Nation of Israel. He is spoken of metaphorically as the Father of the King of Israel. But Jeremias said that nowhere do we find a Jewish person ever addressing God directly as Father before the 10th century AD, one-thousand years after Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

So this amazingly revolutionary thing that Jesus taught about God is something that we frequently overlook because of our over-familiarity with it. Jesus, so far as we know, is the first major religious teacher in history to ever address God as Father, in his prayers, and is the first major religious teacher who taught his followers to relate to God as Father. 175 times in the gospels, Jesus calls God, Father.

Now, listening to Jesus in prayer calling God, Father, Abba, hearing Jesus call God “Abba” is the common term that children use in Judaism to refer to their fathers. It could mean “daddy” or “dad” or simply Father.

Abba = Father, dad or daddy

But hearing Jesus use that term Abba, Father, daddy, dad, when speaking to God left such a powerful impression that a generation later when the Apostle Paul is writing to the church at Rome, he retains this ancient Aramaic term.

Romans 8:15

15The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”

There is something so powerful in the word Daddy. I want you to watch this.

Video

So, what is our perfect father in heaven like? Who is this Abba, Father that Jesus came to reveal to us?

John writes,

1 John 3:1

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

John is communicating to us what the whole Bible communicates – that our Father in Heaven is

A generous father

Jesus says this about Abba Father in Matthew 7:11:

Matthew 7:11

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 1:7-8:

Ephesians 1:7-8

In him [that is in Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us.

Over and over again when the apostle Paul speaks about grace in his letters he uses superlatives. He speaks about the riches of the Father's grace. Paul writes about abundant grace, overflowing grace. Generous, extravagant, overflowing, abundant, wave upon wave of the Father's grace.

That's what the New Testament message is. This past Friday evening, Marlene and I celebrated Passover, by having a Seder dinner as we have done for the past 40 years. There is a popular song that Jews sing at Passover called "Dayenu." It means, "It would have been sufficient. It would have been enough for us." The song recounts the grace of God towards the Jewish people in the exodus event. And as the Father's grace and activity is recounted, the refrain is: It would have been sufficient, but the Father did more. And so the song says:

If God had only freed us from Egypt,
It would have been sufficient. Dayenu.
But he did more. He split the Red Sea.
If God had only split the Red Sea,
It would have been sufficient. Dayenu.
But God did more. He gave us manna in the wilderness to feed us.
If God had only given us manna,
It would have been sufficient.
But he did more. He gave us water in the wilderness.
If God had only given us water,
It would have been sufficient.
But he did more. He gave us the Law.
If God had only done that,
It would have been sufficient.
But then he did more – Dayenu.

And friend, as you think about the generosity of Abba Father, the only thing you could say in Hebrew would be "Dayenu."

When you come to Christ, you receive the forgiveness of your sins, full forgiveness, free forgiveness, complete forgiveness, total forgiveness. If the Father had only forgiven us our sins in Christ, Dayenu – it would have been sufficient. But the Father did more. The Father reconciled us to himself. He not only wiped the slate of our past clean, but he reconciled us to himself. We are now at peace with God. He says to us: "You are now my friends." Beyond forgiveness, the Father calls you "friend." Dayenu. That would have been sufficient.

But more than friend, the Father adopts us into his family as his sons and daughters. He calls us “beloved children.” And if he had only adopted us into his family, Dayenu. That would have been sufficient.

But John says that our Father goes beyond adoption. Here’s what we read in verse 2:

1 John 3:2

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

John says that if God had only adopted us into his family Dayenu, but he went beyond that. He says that as you turn your heart to your Abba, Father, you get to reflect out to the world the love and goodness and grace of God. You get to be a chip off the old block, profoundly resembling your Father in Heaven. We shall be like him – like Father, like sons and daughters.

I could go on and on speaking about Abba Father’s generosity – in answering my prayer, in healing, in giving us his Spirit - but I want to go on and speak about one other quality of our perfect Father. Another quality that meets the deepest need of the human heart, the God who Jesus revealed to us is

An affectionate Father

Many of the men in the World War II generation were taught that you show love to your children by providing for them. Many of those men in the World War II generation became generous, hard-working fathers, but they struggled with showing affection to their children. They were taught a model of manhood that real men don’t show affection. I was incredibly privileged to be raised by an extraordinarily affectionate father who kissed me on the mouth even when I was an adult. This is what Abba Father is like.

God speaks through the prophet Hosea in the Old Testament. He says these words in Hosea 11:1-4:

Hosea 11:1-4

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. 3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. 4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them.

Jesus revealed Abba Father as being like the God Hosea prophesied – bending down, lifting us up, rubbing his beard against our cheeks.

I think of the story of the Prodigal Son. The first part of the story is of a boy, who reaches the age of saying, “I’m going to strike out on my own. Give me what I have coming, Dad, I’m leaving.” He hits the streets and runs through his father’s money. He has no contact with his dad; he doesn’t write. We don’t know how long he stayed away from his father, but it was probably a considerable amount of time. Times get hard for the boy. He sinks lower and lower. He ends up bankrupt, friendless.

And then he makes the decision to go back to his father. He says this in Luke 15:18-19:

Luke 15:18-19

I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’

It is interesting that never once did he think that he couldn’t go back to his father. Nowhere does he communicate that he expects to have the door slammed in his face. Of course, in one of the most moving scenes in the entire Bible, we read this in Luke 15:20:

Luke 15:20

So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

Statue picture – I love this statue because the Father’s affection is so great it is hard to tell where the Father ends and the son begins.

This is the God who you are praying to when you kneel down to pray. Don’t project up to the sky the picture of your dad however good your dad was, or however bad your dad was. No one is like Abba Father, our perfect Father. When you pray, you are like the returning Prodigal. Your Abba Father wraps his arms around you and wants to kiss you by the Holy Spirit. Your Abba Father wants to fill and heal your heart with his perfect, generous, affectionate love. And that heals us.

You know, the Puritans used to call the baptism in the Holy Spirit the Father’s Kiss. What you see in the Bible is this wonderful connection between the Holy Spirit and God’s love. The Apostle Paul writes this in Romans 5: 5

Romans 5:5

And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

The idea is really very simple. In the Apostle Paul's mind, the experience of God's love is the result of the experience of God's Spirit. Saying that God's love is poured out in our hearts is another way of saying that the Holy Spirit is poured out in our hearts.

Our Father's affectionate love is not simply a deduction that you draw out from the pages of scripture. His love is not simply the result of a logical process in your mind.

Whatever else he was, the Holy Spirit is always experienced. There was no thought in the New Testament of a Christianity that is not felt and experienced.

Paul in Romans 5:5 is answering the question how can I know that my Father in Heaven loves me and a part of his answer is "because I feel love." Notice the location of the love of God that is poured out. Paul says in Romans 5:5: "...because the love of God is poured out". Where? In my head? In my mind? Through some sort of doctrinal assertion? The love of God is poured out in our hearts, the deepest part of us, the place of our experience and our feelings.

You will find, throughout the Bible, that the place of the Holy Spirit's activity is chiefly in the heart. What many of us need to pray for to connect up your head, what you have been taught, what you have believed, your doctrine, with your heart, what you're experiencing, what you feel. The one foot drop between head and heart is sometimes the greatest distance a Christian has to cross. To feel the Holy Spirit's presence is to feel our Father's affectionate love.

I read a story about a man who was asked,

"What do you feel the deepest need of your life is?"

The man, without hesitation, said, "I need a new God."

"What do you mean you need a new God?" he was asked.

He went on to explain, "For the past few weekends, I've heard from my pastor that God is my Father and that he loves me. I realized that God is unlike the God I grew up believing in, the God I heard about from my family and my friends in my old church. I need a new God."

Friends, Jesus came to Earth to introduce us to a new God. A God who is a perfect Father: Abba, Daddy, Dad. A generous father, an affectionate father.

Let's pray.

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1 John 3:1-3

- I. All Kinds of Fathers
 - A. Absent Fathers
 - B. Incompetent Fathers
 - C. A Perfect Father
- II. The Incredible Privilege of Being Called God's Child
- III. The Incredible Privilege of calling God, "Father"
 - A. A Generous Father
 - B. An Affectionate Father