

When Parental Love Fails

From: Know and Believe:

A Lifetime Journey toward Rediscovering God's Love for You

Taken from Chapter 15: Limited Love

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I remember sitting numb in church one day after the teaching ended. The sermon was a beautiful one about how God loves us like a father. Glorious examples had been given to help us all see how lovely it is to be His children, and that we can confidently come before Him as a child confidently approaches his own dad. People were coming to the altar in tears, obviously touched by this teaching. What was wrong with me? Why did I feel so unaffected?

Over time, it became obvious to me why my emotions were flat. My father fell woefully short of being a good father to me. My heart wasn't connecting with the idea that God was like a father. My husband, who preached the message while fighting off tears, was the complete opposite. His dad was a fantastic father to him. My dad was cruel with his words. His father was encouraging and proud of him. My father never complimented me. David felt like his dad knew him. My dad didn't know me and didn't seem interested in knowing me. Dave's dad offered wise counsel. My father usually gave harsh, digging criticism. No wonder my heart could not respond to the idea of God loving me like *my* father.

Every year, when Father's Day approached, love and duty sent me to the store to buy a Father's Day card. Reading the glowing testimonies of how much someone might feel loved by one's father brought tears to my eyes every time. I wanted so much to be able to say these things about my dad, but I could not select those cards in a good conscience. I would keep looking until I found one that neither spoke eloquently of my dad nor was unkind. Then I would write my father a neutral happy Father's Day greeting and put the card in the mail. How I loved my daddy. How I longed for him to love me back.

*All little girls
Deify their daddies
And caring fathers do not disappoint them.
Even when, with maturity
She realizes his humanity
There grows an acceptance
Because love is there.*

*Daddy...
What does it feel like?
It must be warm and cuddly,*

*Possibly a place to rest,
Maybe a safe retreat,
Perhaps a non-condemning
Helping hand extended.
Oh, for one sincere Word of praise,
One small
Show of affection,
One morsel of caring!
It would sustain me
For a lifetime.¹*

Over time, this truth has been observable in the lives of many people we've met. Friends and family members who were sincerely loved by their fathers have a clearer confidence in life, and believing God loves them as their Father is as easy as breathing.

For many of us, God's love is more rightly *contrasted* to an earthly father's than compared. We need to believe God loves us and His fatherly love is pure and wonderful. Even though the human comparison doesn't work for some personally, we can come to a place where we can happily say God is our Father without cringing.

Whatever our own fathers lacked, we learn God's love supplies. God encourages. God loves without condition. He knows us and actually likes us. Instead of lamenting we don't have a father who loved us as he should have, we can choose to rejoice we now have a Father who will love us always.

*When I was seven years old
My daddy told my mom,
"I don't love you anymore, Goodbye. I'm gone."
And he never asked what I thought
Then out the door he flew,
And he never really was my daddy again.*

*But Father, you've been the Daddy Daddy refused to be.
You took me in your arms
And then you bounced me on Your knee.
And You taught me all the good things
A daddy really should.
God, you filled the emptiness in me.²*

As a young adult, I came to a time when I had nothing but disdain for my father. He didn't seem to want anything to do with me, so I returned the sentiment. He purposely caused me so much grief over my lifetime

¹ "Oh, for One Morsel of Caring," part of a poem by C. D. Hildebrand, 1989

² "God, You Are My Family", part of a song by C. D. Hildebrand, circa

that I stopped trying to gain his affection. I'm not proud of this. I was wrong to hate him.

Thankfully, one day while I was praying, God encouraged me to forgive my father and to love him and stay in communication with him even though doing so set me up for further frustrations and disappointments. God gave me a sincere love and compassion for my daddy and the grace to "love him anyway."

Over time, my father also learned to love me in his own stifled way. I don't remember him ever saying he loved me, but one of the times when I told him I loved him, shortly before he passed away, he said, "Me too," and I knew that he was sincere. That would have to be enough. The last time I saw him, we departed in peace with that same old familiar disconnected awkward hug. Some of you don't even have that, and I'm so sorry.

✿Please don't let your past destroy your future. ✿

I've used this example of God as our Father, but the truth is when anyone who is supposed to love us doesn't love us, it can cause so much pain and interfere with our knowledge and belief in God's love for us personally. (Often, we are not even aware this is happening.) When your own mother rejects you, it's normal to wonder if God accepts you or if He isn't just as disgusted with you as your mom seems to be. When your spouse is harsh and critical and withholds affection even knowing how much it would mean to you, you might think God is the same way. Divorce can leave a spouse wondering if God might abandon him also.

Please know God is not behind any of the horrible things we experience at the hands of those who should be loving us unconditionally. His heart is breaking when He sees our pain and longs to heal us and bring us peace and the joy of knowing He loves us even when no one else does. **We are valuable to Him.** We are precious to Him. He loves us even if, quite frankly, everything people say about us *is* true—even if we *are* horrible, God deeply loves us and is working in our hearts right now to show His love for us. Amazingly, God loves us even if *we* are the person who has failed to love those we should. That is how amazing His love is.

"Lord, help those who are right now struggling with any relationship that is in disrepair. Bring forgiveness and resolution between family members and friends. Heal the damage that has been done to us. Teach us how greatly we are loved and forgiven so we may also love and forgive. Help us to endure imperfect love from those who surround us and to turn to You as the only source of absolute love."

Isaiah 61:1-3

*"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to **heal the brokenhearted,***

*To proclaim liberty to the **captives**,
And the opening of the prison to those who are **bound**;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
To **console** those who mourn in Zion,
To give them **beauty** for ashes,
The oil of **joy** for mourning,
The garment of **praise** for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord
That He may be glorified.*