

Come Home to the Father

Many people shy away from intimacy with God because the word 'father' conjures up negative feelings. Don't let painful memories keep you from experiencing His love.

I was born with big ears. As a child, I was teased mercilessly, and until I was 40 years old, I could hardly look in a mirror without feeling depressed.

When my youngest son was born, it was obvious from day one that he had inherited the worst of my physical traits. If anyone ever saw our baby pictures side by side, all they could say was, "My goodness!"

I sent Joshua off to his first day of school, hoping for the best. But it was inevitable. When he got off the school bus at the end of the day, he was sobbing.

"Dad, the kids made fun of me all day long! Everybody laughed at my ears. I never want to go back to school again!"

It was a defining moment in my son's life, and I knew it. I immediately took him in my arms, held him tight and told him how handsome he was.

My response changed his life. He never had to go through the suffering I went through because I took the time to comfort him.

When I faced the taunts of other children, my own father never comforted or protected me. He was not able to express love, security or affirmation when I needed it most, and as a result, I experienced pain and rejection I should never have had to feel.

Fortunately, a revelation of the Father's love for me helped to break the cycle of pain in my own life. But for many adults, unresolved father issues from childhood are often a

major cause of emotional pain.

Many Christian psychologists believe that the primary influence on a child's identity is the father-child relationship. When that relationship becomes skewed, children grow up having difficulty relating to other male authority figures. And when they become born again, the issues they have with their earthly fathers often transfer to the new relationship they have with their heavenly Father.

The father issues we have may be unconscious or conscious, but until they are resolved through an experiential revelation of the heavenly Father's love, we will be unable to experience the comforting, affectionate love He has for us. Our anger, fear and distrust, which is often rooted in our hidden pain, easily spills over into every area of our lives—our marriages, our families, our careers, our ministries, our walks with God—and the effects can be devastating.

Father Flaws

All human beings have four basic emotional needs: the need for expressed love, the need to feel secure, the need for praise and affirmation and the need for a purpose in life. As children, we look to our parents, and especially to our fathers, to meet these needs for us.

The family is the place where children learn how to relate to the world, and the lessons learned there are ones carried throughout a lifetime. When these four needs go unmet in childhood, it becomes very difficult for a person to develop healthy relationships, with God or with other people, later in adulthood.

Children look to their fathers to meet the four emotional needs, but unfortunately, no earthly father is perfect. Even the best of them fail to meet all their children's needs all the time.

At some point, disappointments, hurts and wounds will inevitably take place, and these cause what I call “father flaws” to form in the hearts of our children. The leftover pain and wounds from childhood create a lens through which adults later view the world.

Most earthly fathers will fall into one of six categories, each of which creates a different home environment for the children. As you read through the six types of fathers, think back to your own childhood and try to determine how your earthly father related to you.

Each type of father creates different father issues in the adult children and different hindrances to an intimate relationship with God. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any unresolved hidden issues you may still have with your own earthly father that are affecting your ability to relate to your heavenly Father and receive His affectionate love.

The good father. When thinking back to their childhoods, many Christians argue that they came from “good homes” with fathers who loved them and provided for their needs. However, there is no perfect earthly father, and it is impossible for any dad, no matter how good his intentions may be, to raise a child without creating any father issues whatsoever.

Good fathers are just that: good fathers. They provide for their children physically, making sure they have a roof over their heads, clothes to wear and food to eat; and emotionally, they spend time with them and meet their needs for security and affirmation. It seems that children raised in such homes would grow up without any negative repercussions in their adult lives.

But the issues these children have as adults are often very subtle. Sometimes they are unable to let go of their relationships with their earthly dads sufficiently to develop strong relationships with God. Some of these children may even

become pastors or ministers because, having become overly attached to their earthly fathers, they are unable to develop an intimate relationship with God and substitute serving Him for intimacy.

The bond between a good father and his child may become an unhealthy dependence later in life if the adult child continues to look to the father for his or her ultimate source of love and security. Daughters, for example, may experience difficulty “leaving and cleaving” when the time comes for them to leave their fathers’ homes and become wives to their husbands.

Other times, situations may arise that prevent the father from keeping a promise or meeting one of his child’s needs. Even the most well-meaning good father cannot control every situation in his children’s lives. This may end up being even more of a disappointment if the children have grown to have unrealistic expectations of their father.

The performance-oriented father. The performance-oriented father is very common in America today because, as a whole, our society rewards individuals who perform successfully, whether it be in sports, careers, academics or the financial market. This father often proclaims that he loves you, but that love is expressed only when you have measured up to his rigid expectations.

Stringent demands for perfect obedience and high-performance standards, if not tempered with large amounts of expressed love, affirmation and praise, often result in many problems later in life. One of these problems is depression.

No one can do everything right all the time because we are only human beings, and we all experience failure. But after 20 or 30 years of striving for perfection, fear and depression can begin to creep into the heart of adult sons and daughters.

Even if they are born again and Spirit-filled, they may still

believe that God will be pleased with them only when they have read the Bible enough or prayed at least an hour a day. Eventually, if the pattern continues, they can collapse into burnout, unable to hear God's voice or feel His presence at all.

Boundaries and standards are good, and fathers should encourage their children to be the best they can be. But when expressed love and approval become tied to how well a child performs, problems may result. Any criticism or demands for performance must be tempered with large amounts of affection and affirmation.

The passive father. The passive father does not either make great demands on his children or overtly reject them. He simply fails to be "home" even when he is home. He is unable to demonstrate any sort of love or affection at all, usually because he never received these things from his own father.

He doesn't speak the words of love that his children need to hear; he doesn't reach out to his sons and daughters with warmth or hugs or kisses, or cuddle them on his lap. He may be physically present in the home, but he isn't able to allow himself to be known.

He does not share his joys, his hopes, his sorrows or his disappointments with his wife or children. He does not experience life with his family; he simply lives his life under the same roof.

When a person has been raised in the home of a passive father, his relationship with God may be devoid of passion and joy. Discipline, form and duty keep things safe because he has become uncomfortable with any show of emotion. When relating to God, he often will have a mental or intellectual assent to the gospel but will rarely let the Father touch his heart so that he can truly taste His love.

People like this are quite often the adults who are the

quickest to criticize any “emotional” move of the Holy Spirit in the church. Any weeping or loud rejoicing or praise to the Father causes them to feel extremely uncomfortable.

But walking in the Spirit should be an emotional encounter. It’s about love, joy and peace much more than it is about the study of doctrine or theory. God wants to touch our hearts and emotions; He wants to restore healthy emotions in our relationships.

The absentee father. Today in America the absentee father is becoming more and more common. He is the one who is no longer physically present in the home due to death, divorce or abandonment.

Fifty percent of children in America wake up each morning with someone other than their natural birth father in the home. And too often this father figure does not have a strong interest in meeting their emotional needs. This is not true in every case, of course; there are godly stepfathers who love their stepchildren as if they were their own, but that is a rare occurrence.

Children who have had an absentee father may face abandonment issues, and it may be very difficult for them to relate to God. Even if they do foster a relationship with Him, there may be a sense of fear that at some point, He will not be there for them. These children need an experiential revelation of God’s presence and unconditional love in their lives.

The authoritarian father. Authoritarian fathers are those fathers who are more interested in the love of law than in the law of love. They go beyond the performance-oriented fathers and sternly demand immediate, unquestioned obedience from their children. They foster no positive emotional relationship between themselves and their children; rather, they use intimidation and fear to control them.

These fathers are usually very selfish; the entire life of the family revolves around them and their needs. They do not recognize the unique individuality of each child but see the children as a means to getting their own needs met.

Children raised in such homes will see God as the Great Cop in the sky, a harsh authoritarian figure to be feared and obeyed rather than a loving Father to be enjoyed and cherished. They strive so hard to meet His requirements that they feel more like servants than children whom the Father loves.

The abusive father. Verbal, emotional, physical or sexual abuse is never an acceptable form of behavior for a father to practice. Tragically, however, all these types of abuse are becoming common in families throughout the United States. If you have been abused in any of these ways, you may need more than counseling or psychological therapy to be free from the deep pain and anger; you may need deep healing that can come only as the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into your heart (see Rom. 5:5).

Abuse, especially sexual abuse, creates one of the deepest wounds a child can ever experience, for it results in tremendous hidden pain. It violates the trust the child has placed in authority and can affect all his relationships for the rest of his life.

Sexual abuse leaves children consumed with hidden fears and a deep distrust of God, pastors, other authority figures and other men. It creates feelings of guilt and a profound sense of shame and unworthiness.

It can leave children feeling as if they did something to deserve to be treated so badly. And underneath it all, there is tremendous repressed anger, much of it focused on God for allowing the abuse to occur.

No matter what type of father you had as a child, you don't have to remain wounded, carrying the pain from father issues

in your heart. You can forgive your father for each area in which he failed to represent the father-heart of God, and you can release the wounds caused by him to the One who can heal them. You can get to know your heavenly Father through Jesus, who gave His life for us and shows us what His Father is like.

Jesus is always reaching out to pour His love upon us. Allow that perfect love to comfort you as you listen to the words your Father speaks to you, His beloved son or daughter: “My child, I want to rejoice over you with singing. I want to quiet you in My love.

“I have loved you with an everlasting love, and I am drawing you with lovingkindness. I will not leave you as an orphan, but I will come to you and bless you as My child” (see Zeph. 3:17; Jer. 31:3; John 14:18,21).

Whatever needs you have—physical, spiritual or emotional—your heavenly Father can fill them as no earthly father ever could. Come home to Him, and give Him the opportunity to show you how loving, dependable and constant He is.

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