

Do You Really Know the Father's Love?

Many people struggle to believe God loves them because of a dysfunctional mom or dad.

This past weekend I spoke to some students at a college in New Hampshire. Knowing that many young people today come from broken homes (more than 1 million children today are the victims of divorce), I felt I needed to talk to them about the fatherly heart of God. I wasn't surprised when several people's eyes got misty as soon as I mentioned the word "father."

What about you? Do you have emotional wounds resulting from your upbringing? If so, such hurts can block your understanding of God's unconditional love. I encourage you to not only forgive your parents but also to renounce unhealthy mindsets you may have adopted because of trauma. Make sure you believe the following:

1. Your heavenly Father will never abandon you. Nothing is more traumatic to a child than a family breakup. Children often blame themselves for divorce—and they experience acute feelings of insecurity. They can also develop the wrong idea that if their father or mother was willing to walk away from them, God will do the same.

Believe the truth: God says, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Heb. 13:5, NASB). Earthly parents may break promises, but God is always faithful.

2. Your heavenly Father will never verbally berate you. I recently met a girl whose parents wanted her to be a boy. As a result of their disapproval, they criticized her constantly, told her she was ugly and demanded that she stay in her room most of the time. As a result of this constant criticism she

struggled to receive love and found it difficult to believe God could ever love her.

Believe the truth: The Lord is a loving Father who speaks tenderly to His children; and even when He must discipline us, it is for our good. James 5:11 says: "We ... have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful."

3. Your heavenly Father will never abuse you. I have an African friend, Medad, whose cruel, domineering father beat him with the same stick he used to beat his mother. Medad still has scars on his back, chest and stomach from his father's angry outbursts. Finally, his father piled the family into a car, drove them into a rural area and ordered them to get out of the vehicle. He cursed them and left them to die. His father's behavior made Medad angry and vengeful until he found salvation in Jesus.

Believe the truth: God is not an abuser. He is a good Shepherd who protects us. If you were abused by someone, either physically, sexually or verbally, recognize that God did not approve of that behavior and He wants to heal you from the pain of that experience.

4. Your heavenly Father will never withhold affection from you. I've met dozens of men whose fathers never once said to them, "I love you." Many of these guys struggle today with addictions to alcohol, drugs and other mind-numbing substances because they don't know how to process the lack of security they feel. And women who never received healthy, non-sexual affection from their fathers often end up trapped in a promiscuous lifestyle because they're searching for the love they were denied.

Believe the truth: God is crazy about you and He wants to shower you with love! Isaiah described God as a Shepherd who gathers His lambs and carries them in His bosom (see Is.

40:11). As a believer in Christ you always have access to the Father through the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 2:18). He wants you to be close to Him.

5. Your heavenly Father will never abandon you financially. A loving parent, no matter how small their income, can make a child feel secure by providing food on the table, a warm bed and clothes to wear. Unfortunately, in these days of deadbeat dads and struggling one-parent families, many people grow up financially crippled. God doesn't automatically give people Cadillacs if they tithe, but any follower of Jesus can bank on God's promises of provision.

Believe the truth: Jesus said the Father knows we need food, clothes and shelter. "Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:31-33). We serve a generous God.

6. Your heavenly Father will never act in an unstable manner. I have a friend whose father was a secret alcoholic. As a boy, my friend never understood why his father was nice one day and angry the next. He blamed himself for his dad's erratic behavior—and to this day he still carries some of the pain of that emotional trauma.

Believe the truth: God is not unstable. He never gets drunk, high or out of control. 1 Sam. 15:29 says God "will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind." Circumstances never affect God's nature. He will always, always, always stay the same.

No matter what fatherly wounds you may have suffered, and no matter how long ago the pain entered, God can heal your heart and fill in the gaps. Reach out and receive the Father's embrace.

J. Lee Grady is the former editor of *Charisma*. You can follow him on Twitter a leegrady. His most recent book is *10 Lies Men*

Believe (Charisma House).