

“15 Qualities Every Family Needs to See in a Dad and Why”

1. One who is saved and seeking a daily walk with God (Gen. 5:24; 6:9).
It creates in the family a hunger for God.
2. One who exercises godly leadership (1 Cor. 11:3; Col. 3:18-21).
It teaches children respect for authority; it teaches sons how to be godly leaders as husbands and daughters godly followers as wives.
3. One who honors the Bible as God’s Word in attitude and action.(Ps. 119, James 1:22-25). *It will build respect for God’s Word, and it will also build respect in the children for a dad who reads, studies, and obeys God’s Word.*
4. One who lives by scriptural principles and conviction (Josh. 24:15, Acts 5:29, II Tim. 3:16).
It will encourage family members, especially the children, to form their own biblical commitments and live by them.
5. One who loves unconditionally (1 Cor. 13). *It builds acceptance and a sense of self-worth.*
6. One who loves mother and shows it (Eph. 5: 25-33).
It builds security in the life of the family.
7. One who disciplines in love (Eph. 6:4, Heb. 12:5-13).
It builds a sound relationship with the children for future responsibilities and relationships.
Correction belongs ultimately to the father rather than the mother!
8. One who has a servant spirit (Matt. 20:26-28). *It builds a family attitude of humility and willingness to serve others just like dad.*
9. One who confesses his failures and is willing to say, “I’m sorry, I was wrong” (James 5:16).
It creates openness and respect by the children towards dad.
10. One who has a forgiving spirit (Eph. 4:32, Col. 3:13).
It creates the security of genuine love and needed assurance for your children.
11. One who expresses gratitude and appreciation to God and others (Col. 3:15).
It builds an attitude of gratitude in the family, and fosters joy and thankfulness.
12. One who listens attentively (James 1:19-21). *The family gains a sense of personal value and importance.*
13. One who keeps his word (Num. 30:2, Prov. 6:16-19). *It builds faithfulness, truthfulness, and responsibility in the children.*
14. One who prays for and with his children (James 4:1-3, 5:16). *It will teach the family to trust in and depend on God to meet their needs.*
15. One who is spirit-filled and seeking to be like Jesus (Rom. 8:28-30, Gal. 5:22-23, Eph. 5:18). *It will give the family a visible example of a godly, Christ-like individual. For that example to be the husband/father would be most pleasing to our Lord and Savior.*

“15 Qualities Every Family Needs to See in a Dad and Why”
(Deuteronomy 6:1-9)

Introduction

“One morning my father didn’t get up and go to work. He went to the hospital and died the next day. I hadn’t thought that much about him before. He was just someone who left and came home and seemed glad to see everyone at night. He opened the jar of pickles when no one else could. He was the only one in the house who wasn’t afraid to go into the basement by himself. He cut himself shaving, but no one kissed it or got excited about it. It was understood when it rained, he got the car and brought it around to the door. When anyone was sick, he went out to get the prescription filled. He took lots of pictures ... but he was never in them. Whenever I played house, the mother doll had a lot to do. I never knew what to do with the daddy doll, so I had him say, “I’m going off to work now” and threw him under the bed.

The funeral was in our living room and a lot of people came and brought all kinds of good food and cakes. We had never had so much company before. [Later], I went to my room and felt under the bed for the daddy doll. When I found him, I dusted him off and put him on my bed. He never did anything. I didn’t know his leaving would hurt so much.”

- Erma Bombeck
Family – The Ties That Bind ... And Gag!
Pp. 2-3

God intended for dads to be a gift to their family. Indeed, we are learning with each passing day that it is essential for dads to be a gift to their family.

More than 70% of teens who attempt suicide have parents who are divorced (*US News and World Report*, May 7, 2001; p. 43). The overwhelming majority, by the way, are boys.

Daddy Stats

According to David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values in New York City and co-founder of the National Fatherhood Initiative:

- 40% of American children currently don’t live with their biological fathers.
- 70% of juveniles in state reform institutions grew up with one or neither parent.
- 43% of adult inmates grew up in single-parent homes, mostly without dads.
- 30% of children living with never-married mothers and 22% with divorced mothers repeat a grade, compared with 12 % of those living with both biological parents.

- “The Lost Art of Fatherhood,” March 1996
American Demographics

Transition

Yes, dads need to be a gift to their family, but exactly what kind of gift? What does God want and what does a family need in a dad? Let me quickly survey Scripture and identify 15 qualities every family needs to see in a dad and why.

1. One who is saved and seeking a daily walk with God (Gen. 5:24; 6:9).

It creates in the family a hunger for God.

Genesis 5:24 – “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.”

Genesis 6:9 – “These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.”

- ❖ “When the mother of the family is the first person to accept Christ, the rest of the family will convert 17% of the time. When a child is first, the family follows 31% of the time. However, when the father turns to Christ first, the family will follow him 93% of the time.”
- *Stand Firm*, July 2000 (p. 3)

2. One who exercises godly leadership (1 Cor. 11:3; Col. 3:18-21).

It teaches children respect for authority; it teaches sons how to be godly leaders as husbands and daughters godly followers as wives.

1 Corinthians 11:3 – “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.”

Colossians 3:18-21 – “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them. Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.”

- ❖ In the church if men lead, women will follow. In the church, if women lead, men will sit back and watch! The same is true in the home!
- ❖ “Most Christian parents admit that the church and the Bible do not influence their parenting style. Only 33% of born-again parents cited their faith as the dominant influence on how they relate to their children. Many parents (45%) listed their own upbringing as the main influence, followed by the example of friends and relatives (35%), and printed material on parenting (34%). Nearly 80% said they thought the church should take a more active role in helping people become better parents.
- *Ministries Today*, Mar/Apr 1998 (p. 13)
- ❖ Marvin Olasky, “God does not forbid women to be leaders in society, but when that occurs it’s usually because of the abdication of men. As in the situation of Deborah and Barak, there’s a certain shame attached to it.”
- *New Republic Online*, April 10, 2000
- ❖ A good woman is worth her weight in gold, but a good man is worth twice his weight in gold because there are so few of them.

3. **One who honors the Bible as God's Word in attitude and action** (Ps. 119, James 1:22-25). *It will build respect for God's Word, and it will also build respect in the children for a dad who reads, studies, and obeys God's Word.*

Psalm 119:11-16 – “Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee. Blessed art Thou, O Lord; teach me Thy statutes. With my lips I have told of all the ordinances of Thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate on Thy precepts, and regard Thy ways. I shall delight in Thy statutes; I shall not forget Thy word.”

James 1:22-25 – “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.

- ❖ Be a man of courage, conviction and commitment.
- ❖ Don't be, as Francis Schaffer noted, a man with the priorities of your personal peace and your personal prosperity.

4. **One who lives by scriptural principles and conviction** (Josh. 24:15, Acts 5:29, II Tim. 3:16).

It will encourage family members, especially the children, to form their own biblical commitments and live by them.

Joshua 24:15 – “And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Acts 5:29 – “But Peter and the apostles answered and said, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’”

II Timothy 3:16 – “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”

“You will never really know what kind of parent you were or if you did it right or wrong. Never. And you will worry about this and them as long as you live. But when your children have children and you watch them do what they do, you will have part of an answer.”

- Robert Fulghum

Quoted in *Group*, Jan/Feb 1998, p. 40

Fathers Are Teachers

Fathers have about the greatest opportunity as teachers of anyone in the world – in many respects greater than the opportunity of the school teacher. You see, that boy or girl in the home has the chance to see if father and mother really believe and practice what they teach.

A father who acts as if he believed in Sunday school, and then doesn't go himself, is teaching by his actions that he really doesn't feel it very important; a father who teaches love and tolerance to all and yet maintains a critical attitude in the home toward his brothers and sisters in the church, is doing a wrong to his children which never in this world can be undone. It is pure poison to the mind of the child, and will most certainly be a stumbling block in the way of the child becoming a Christian.

A father who says he believes the Bible to be the greatest Book in the world as he leaves it on the shelf to gather dust while he spends hours with the newspaper, magazines, radio and television is in reality saying, "Children, the Bible really isn't too important. Read it, if you have any extra time."

What one of you hasn't heard a little boy step proudly forward among his playmates and declare, "I KNOW that's so because my Daddy said so!" He has confidence in you, dear Father, and the things which he sees you put first in your life are going to stand out as mighty important to him, too.

You see, father, YOU ARE A TEACHER!

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A Father's Guide to Making a Delinquent Child

1. Begin at infancy to give the child everything he wants. In this way he will grow up to believe the world owes him a living.
2. When he picks up bad words, laugh at him. That will make him think he's amusing.
3. Never give him any spiritual training. Wait until he's **21** and then let him decide for himself.
4. Pick up everything he leaves lying about – books, shoes, clothes; do everything for him so that he will be experienced in throwing all responsibility onto others.
5. Quarrel frequently in his presence. In this way he will not be too shocked when the home is broken later.
6. Give the child all the pocket money he wants. Never let him earn his own. Why should he have things as tough as you had them?
7. Satisfy his every craving for food, drink and comfort. Denial may lead to harmful frustration.
8. Take his side against neighbors, teachers, policemen. They are all prejudiced against your child anyway.
9. When he gets into serious trouble, apologize for yourself by saying, "I could never do anything for him."
10. Prepare for a life of grief. You are bound to have it.

- Courtesy Houston Police Dept.

5. **One who loves unconditionally (1 Cor. 13).**

It builds acceptance and a sense of self-worth.

1 Corinthians 13 – “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

Twenty Ways to Say “I Love You” for Dads

1. Begin each day by hugging your wife and each child, and telling them you love them.
2. Plan a special night each week for just you and your wife.
3. Plan at least one time per month when you can be alone with each child individually ... to make that child feel special.
4. Plan special family trips and activities in advance, so the family can have something to anticipate together.
5. Surprise the family. Cancel a morning, an afternoon or even a whole day at work - - just to be with the family.
6. Take your daughter shopping. Take your son to a ball game. Take them both fishing.
7. Pick a day and let each child go to work with you.
8. Take one of your children with you on one of your next business trips.
9. Take one of your children to special athletic events or shows.
10. Lead your family in prayer at each meal.
11. Read the Bible to your family.
12. Tell each child what your dreams are for him or her.
13. Tell each child how much you love her/him, and how very special she/he is. Specifically mention what you like about that child.
14. Let your children see your tender feelings.
15. Demonstrate an interest in your children’s school work, musical interest, etc. Ask them to tell you about it. Listen ... listen ... listen!
16. Read some good books on parenting and parent/child relationships.
17. Attend a seminar or workshop on parenting.
18. Write each child a love letter and mail it.
19. Apologize to your wife and children for your mistakes and shortcomings – as a husband and father. Tell them what you plan to do to be different.
20. End each day by hugging your wife and each child, and by telling them you love them.

- ***Preacher***

Harold O’Chester
Great Hills Baptist Church
Austin, Texas

6. ***One who loves mother and shows it (Eph. 5: 25, 33).***

It builds security in the life of the family.

Ephesians 5: 25 – “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...”

Ephesians 5:33 – “Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself;”

- ❖ On the first Father’s Day of the new millennium, nearly 25 million children woke up in a home in which their father did not live.

- Wade Horn 6-13-2000

Fathers Count and Marriage Matters

Kathleen Parker

Jewish World Review; Oct. 4, 1999

“A father’s best gift? His presence.”

“IT IS SAID that the best thing a father can do for his daughter is to love her mother.

A girl lucky enough to observe her “first man” demonstrating affection and respect for the woman with whom she most strongly identifies grows up with confidence and high self-esteem. More likely than not, she’ll set her standards high when seeking her own mate.

Now, new research published in the August issue of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* suggests that there’s more fathers can do: Be there. The gist of the study of 173 girls and their families is that girls who have a close, positive family relationship in their first five years - - especially with their fathers - - enter puberty later in life. Specifically, the researchers found that girls reaching puberty later had fathers who were active caregivers and had positive relationships with the mothers.

Conversely, the researchers - - led by Dr. Bruce Ellis of the University of Canterbury in New Zealand - - found that girls who grew up without their father at home, or in dysfunctional homes where the father was present, entered puberty earlier. Why? Apparently girls’ biological clocks are tuned not only to their physical environment but to the emotional atmosphere as well. We’ve learned that girls who grow up without fathers tend to become sexually active at earlier ages, that girls without fathers tend to look for male approval in intimate relationships before they’re emotionally ready.

In recent years, girls have become sexually active at earlier ages than ever before in American history. Is it mere coincidence that, simultaneously, more girls than ever are growing up in households without their biological fathers?”

7. **One who disciplines in love** (*Eph. 6:4, Heb. 12:5-13*).

It builds a sound relationship with the children for future responsibilities and relationships.

CORRECTION BELONGS ULTIMATELY TO THE FATHER RATHER THAN THE MOTHER!

Ephesians 6:4 – “And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

Hebrews 12:5-13 – “...and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.” It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to disciplines, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for *our* good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.”

8. **One who has a servant spirit** (*Matt. 20:26-28*).

It builds a family attitude of humility and willingness to serve others just like dad.

Matthew 20:26-28 – “Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

The Beatitudes of a Godly Man

1. Blessed is the man who puts God’s business above all other business.
2. Blessed is the man who brings his family to church rather than sending them.
3. Blessed is the man who gives to God cheerfully rather than withholding selfishly.
4. Blessed is the man who has a passion to help rather than be helped.
5. Blessed is the man who can see his own faults before he sees the faults of others.
6. Blessed is the man who, when wrong, can say, “I’m sorry.”
7. Blessed is the man who is willing and desirous to be a right example to every boy he meets.
8. Blessed is the man who considers success in God’s eyes more valuable than success in the world’s eyes.
9. Blessed is the man who is most concerned about winning souls for Christ, beginning with his own family.
10. Blessed is the man to whom God can say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

9. **One who confesses his failures and is willing to say, "I'm sorry, I was wrong"** (James 5:16).
It creates openness and respect by the children towards dad.

James 5:16 – “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

What Fathers Say Most

In a survey done by family-life specialist Delmer Holbrook, three things are said most often by fathers in responding to their kids;

1. “I’m too tired.”
2. “We don’t have enough money.”
3. “Keep quiet.”

- *Christianity Today*, August 27, 1976

10. **One who has a forgiving spirit** (Eph. 4:32, Col. 3:13).

It creates the security of genuine love and needed assurance for your children.

Ephesians 4:32 – “And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

Colossians 3:13 – “...bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

❖ You will never forgive anyone as much as God in Christ has already forgiven you!!!

11. **One who expresses gratitude and appreciation to God and others** (Col. 3:15).

It builds an attitude of gratitude in the family, and fosters joy and thankfulness.

Colossians 3:15 – “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

12. **One who listens attentively** (James 1:19-21).

The family gains a sense of personal value and importance.

James 1:19-21 – “This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.”

❖ Cornell University conducted a study of the amount of time middle class fathers spent with their small children each day. The result averaged out at 37.7 seconds a day. And yet, before the test, the fathers guessed they spend something like 40 minutes.

The Greatest Man

The greatest man I never knew lived just down the hall
And every day we said, "Hello," though we never touched at all.
He was in his paper and I was in my room.
How was I to know he thought I hung the moon.

The greatest man I never knew, I guess I'll never know.
He worked late almost every night
He never had too much to say, too much was on his mind.
Now it seems so sad that everything he gave us took all he had.
Days faded to years and the memories to black and white.
He grew cold like an old winter wind that blew across my life.

The greatest words I never heard, I guess I'll never hear.
The man I thought would never die has been dead almost a year.
He was good at business, but there was business left to do.
He never said he loved me; guess he thought I knew.

- Reba McIntyre

13. One who keeps his word (Num. 30:2, Prov. 6:16-19).

It builds faithfulness, truthfulness, and responsibility in the children.

Numbers 30:2 – "If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."

Proverbs 6:16-19 – "There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness *who* utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers."

A Christian Father's "10 Commandments"

1. Thou shalt hold no other group more important than the family unit, in all thy ways being faithful to it.
2. Thou shalt teach thy sons and daughters to love, respect, and obey their parents.
3. Thou shalt be a loving and considerate husband.
4. Thou shalt not speak in a manner unbecoming to a Christian gentlemen.
5. Thou shalt make Sunday a day set aside for God and worship as a family.
6. Thou shalt provide for thy family – spiritually and physically.
7. Thou shalt promote and lead family worship in thy home.
8. Thou shalt be honest in all thy dealings.
9. Thou shalt respect the desires and freedoms of thy family as individuals.
10. Thou shalt be the head of thy household while leading it with love.

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14. One who prays for and with his children (James 4:1-3, 5:16).

It will teach the family to trust in and depend on God to meet their needs.

James 4:1-3 – “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

James 5:16 – “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

Professionals View Fathering Behaviors

A survey was taken of twenty-five Christian professional people to ascertain the most important activities and behaviors fathers could engage in with their children. The survey included ministers (2), pastoral counselors (2), psychiatrists (4), psychologists (5), Marriage/Family Therapists (6), medical doctors (2), and therapists/counselors (4). There were nineteen males and six females in the survey. Fourteen of the subjects still had fathers living at the time the survey was taken and only four were from broken homes.

The survey revealed these activities/behaviors to be most important in the opinion of these Christian professionals:

- 1) hug/kiss
- 2) attend church/Sunday School together
- 3) pray together
- 4) counsel with child
- 5) have child sit on father's lap
- 6) have deep conversations
- 7) have father attend school activities
- 8) discuss sexual issues
- 9) read Bible together
- 10) work on a hobby together

15. One who is spirit-filled and seeking to be like Jesus (Rom. 8:28-30, Gal. 5:22-23, Eph. 5:18).

It will give the family a visible example of a godly, Christ-like individual. For that example to be the husband/father would be most pleasing to our Lord and Savior.

Romans 8:28-30 – “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Galatians 5:22-23 – “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

Ephesians 5:18 – “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit...”

“A little girl followed her father in newly-planted clumps of St. Augustine grass. She stepped exactly where he stepped. She said, “Daddy, if you don’t get mud on your feet, I won’t get any mud on me!”

Conclusion

“All over this country little children are reaching for fathers who aren’t there. I want to evangelize as many people as possible, but my number one job is to evangelize my children. If America is going to survive, it will be because husbands and fathers begin to put their families at the highest level of priorities and reserve something of their time, effort, and energy for leadership within their own homes.”

- Dr. James Dobson

We Never Knew Each Other

“Dad, you never really knew me, you weren’t around to help me see that you had dreams; there were things you wanted to be. I didn’t know how to reach out to you; and you didn’t know how to reach out to me. So we grew apart and the distance became greater. We became strangers. Yes, you must have had dreams, goals, hurts, happiness. What was your life like? What did life bring to you? Dad, I’ve found another kind of father. He is my Heavenly Father. All of these years I had felt a void and an ache in my very being. One day I just cried out, and Jesus just wrapped His loving arms around me and the void was gone! Dad, He loves me and has plans for my future. We talk together. When I’m hurt or confused or just plain happy, He is with me. He is in everything I do. Dad, I wish we could have had that relationship. It would have made understanding my Heavenly Father quite a bit easier. But Dad, I’ve begun a journey, the greatest journey of all; I pray that someday you can meet my Father. Then you and I wouldn’t be strangers anymore; we would be friends, we would be one in Christ. No longer strangers. How nice that would be.”

His Little Girl

(Trusting the Heavenly Father after an earthly one fails)

Barbara Curtis, *World*, 6-13-98

“I REMEMBER THE DAY MY DAD LEFT. HE KNELT AND HUGGED me and cried. The skimpy dress of a five-year-old girl could not protect me from the chill that gathered around my arms and legs. The scratchy tickly whiskers – would I feel them no more? The arms that felt so safe – would they be gone forever? What would it be like not to have a father?”

The years to come provided harsh answers to those questions. Mine was not a carefree childhood. Shuffled with two brothers between foster home, relatives, and – when things worked out – my mother, I toughed out the tough times. My innocence gave way early on to a cynic’s worldview: Don’t depend on anyone and no one will disappoint you. As we approach the celebration of Father’s Day..., anyone without a father will understand that the loss doesn’t end when you grow up. The scars are like the glossy, too-tight skin that grows over a deep wound.

Beneath the protective cover lies too much tenderness. For the longest time I didn't know about the tenderness. I tended the gloss – taking control of my future, acquiring a good education, rising above the pattern of my family's past. I guess you might say with no one to believe in, I learned to believe in myself. Only when this unsustainable strategy dropped me down and out – and more alone than ever – did I finally face my fatherlessness.

So it was in my 30s, sensing a spiritual vacuum, that I finally launched a search for God. For someone like me the New Age movement held enormous appeal. Here I could wander into nooks and crannies, borrowing this and that to construct an image of God to mesh with my own deficiencies. Crippled by the lack of a real father in my life, seeing God only as some remote and impersonal force, my hope was that through understanding I could appropriate the force – recognizing “God within me” – then manipulate it to find happiness. With my eyes on the ground, happiness was as high as I could aim my sight. I wouldn't have thought to seek God's love. And yet how amazingly unconditional and enduring that love remained for me. As I misunderstood God and wandered, he still protected me from harm, continuing to draw me nearer, gradually softening my heart.

My husband helped to soften me – though I never could have told him then. Watching him father our children was like peeking through a frosted pane into a warm and cozy room within. Although seeing my children experience a happy childhood was the next best thing to having one myself, how I wished sometimes to climb inside and receive that kind of love myself. How ready I was the moment I first understood that God was my father. At last, I was someone's little girl! To this day, 10 years later, I cannot approach God intellectually, but only as a child and with no reservations, I feel such love: Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me (Psalm 27:10).

Is it not a miracle that someone who missed an earthly father's love can be healed to receive the love of the Heavenly Father? But isn't he the Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals? Isn't it the greatest privilege of all to call him Abba, Father? According to Vine's Word Dictionary, “*Abba* is a word framed by the lips of infants and betokens unreasoning trust. Father expresses an intelligent apprehension of the relationship. The two together express the love and intelligent confidence of a child.”

I remember once, before he left, my father carrying me home in his arms as blood gushed from a jagged cut on my foot. I was four and I was frightened, hoping that my father could take care of me. But though that day he stopped the bleeding, no earthly father could have healed the wounded heart he later left behind. That hurt cried out for the love of a Heavenly Father. And so I will always be God's grateful little girl – trusting, dependant, and filled with faith in the arms that will never let me go.”