

God wants to meet you with a hug Identity Part 2

A testimony about God's fatherhood – a personal journey from orphan to son
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Behold I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite their land with a curse (Malachi 4:5-6).



There is a curse in the world, and the curse is fatherlessness: for some, not even knowing that they have a father. For others, that the father they do know does not match up to the fullness of God's intention. God wants us to know Him as a real Father and wants us to feel loved and accepted as His real children. He is releasing His Spirit to turn the world back to Him, in an outpouring that embraces who we are as God's children and releases that out to the world in an experiential and practical way, so that everyone can experience His love.

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you. Abide in My love (John 15:9).

This is Jesus' call to us to live in His love, and it has to be practical. It has to work: as God loves us so we love each other.

I want to share briefly from my own testimony, from my journey in which I have come to know something deeper about the heart of God.

With my natural dad, I didn't know love, affection, affirmation, approval or encouragement: really no fathering at all. Even while he was there physically, he wasn't there emotionally; and then he physically left too, leaving a big hole on the inside of me. Not knowing what a father should be, I just thought that was what fathers were like, because I didn't know any better.

So when I became a Christian I didn't have a relationship with God as Father. I knew Jesus, because Jesus died on the cross for me. And I know He was supposed to be my Lord. So I knew Him as Lord, but 'Father'? – it didn't even compute. It wasn't that I struggled with it. I didn't even know that God could be my Father: it was such an alien concept to me. When I was baptised in the Spirit it was like liquid love poured into me. It was an amazing experience. Yet although I felt called to something because I felt love, I still didn't know where it was from.

My first real encounter of the love of God as Father was in a time of worship. It was like God came and put His arms around me and hugged me. I knew that was the

Father's hug. I just felt it in my spirit. Now that really challenged me: how could that be a father? And I suddenly started to realise more about fatherhood. I had a revelation of the truth that God was not like my earthly father. Now you might think that's really simple but actually you don't know it, until you know it.

And I had a revelation of that. God started to work that in me, but I needed ministry, I needed help, because I could not break through into this whole area. So I had some ministry sessions, and God gave me a picture. It was a picture of a photograph, a real photograph that was in our kitchen when I was growing up. It was a photograph of me sat on my dad's knee. It just hit me like a ton of bricks that this was a posed picture, a sham that never actually happened in reality. And it really, really got to me emotionally. In fact my whole relationship with my earthly father was a total sham.

Emotionally it was a really hard thing to do, and I had to really choose to do it as an act of will, but it caused me to choose to forgive him and release him from not being a real dad to me.

It was hard, because I didn't want to do it: it suddenly hit me that he didn't deserve it, that he had screwed me over for years – that's literally how I felt. It really hit me hard. I didn't let those emotions out right then, but I chose to forgive and release him, and God enabled me to go and see him and give him a hug. He did not know what to do, he stood there frozen as I gave him a hug and told him I loved him. He didn't know how to respond. I didn't have a problem with that because I knew the reason was that he'd never been loved by his own father. But when I chose to forgive him, it opened up a whole different relationship with God for me.

Now that was back in the early 1990's. Then, just before we moved to Barnstaple in 1994, we had a series of meetings in the Castle Centre here in the town. One evening I had come up and I was doing some teaching as a prelude to setting up the church. We had a time of worship and all the emotion I hadn't been able to let out from this whole thing with my dad all of a sudden just spilled out like a torrent. I wailed and I wailed and I wailed on the floor, and all the emotions flooded out. I realised it had all been stored up inside me, and at the end of it I was glad it was gone. That was a powerful experience.

Then about a year or so later, I had what I now know was my first encounter in heaven. Again, it was in a time of worship, and this one long note on the saxophone just took me into heaven. God took me on his knee, just like in that sham photograph with my earthly father, but this time gave me a real experience of what it was to be bounced on a father's knee and played with. It restored something deeper again of the relationship I had missed with my father. God is a great God and wants to restore us.

But in spite of all this, years later when I was on a 40-day fast, going into heaven and seeing God and meeting with Him for 2 weeks, it was Jesus and the Holy Spirit I was meeting with, not the Father. Then Jesus came to me and said: "You need to meet with the Father". I knew in my own heart I needed to meet with the Father, and yet I couldn't. Then Jesus showed me a big scar that went right over my heart. I was looking down at this wound and He said, "you have a father-wound."

And I started to argue: "I've forgiven my father. I've done everything I can." He said again, "You have a father-wound." He spoke to me in that encounter and told me He loved me over and over and over again. And each time He said loved me and I received it, that wound began to disappear bit by bit until it was completely gone. It took about 45 minutes in earthly time (I don't know how long it took in heavenly time) but it just went on and on, because He just would not relent until that wound was gone. And it went.

Since then my whole intimacy with my heavenly Father has been restored. I hang out with Him in His garden, He hangs out with me in the garden of my own heart. Now that was just the wounds being healed. You see, I might have been minus 60 on a woundedness scale, and some people are a lot worse than that, if they have experienced real abuse from their earthly fathers and others. But although all my wounds were healed, that just brought me back to zero on the scale. I didn't want to be zero. Zero is better than being minus 60, but I wanted to be on the plus side!

I still needed to be fathered. What was it to be fathered? I did not know because I had never been fathered. So then I had to learn, how does God father me? I had an encounter with Him one morning and I was talking to Him, but I felt something was missing: I didn't feel intimate. And He spoke to me and asked me "Why do you feel that?"

I struggled to explain, "Because I don't *feel* it felt intimate". He said "Well, what is intimacy?" Now I was looking for the kind of experiences that other people had described. I was looking for intimacy to have all the 'warm and fuzzies', and to feel lovely (and actually, sometimes you do get that, which is great).

But God said "When is it you really feel alive? When do you really feel close to me?" So I thought about it. "When You are talking to me and You're sharing Your heart with me and when You are revealing the Word to me". He said "That's me fathering you." It totally freaked me out to think that I didn't have to have a relationship like anybody else's or experience what other people said intimacy was. I could just be me.

And for me, with my redemptive gift, God's love language to me is sharing with me and just having quality time with Him, quality time in which we just get to hang out together. It doesn't matter if I feel all warm and fuzzy. Sometimes I just spend an hour with Him and come out of that time with pages of notes, because He has talked to me about stuff. I know He loves me. That is for me what has brought me into a place of freedom. We all need to find the love languages of our Father: how does God love you? What is (or would be) intimacy with Him to you?

Do you feel like you don't belong? Do you feel you don't fit anywhere? Do you still feel like an orphan? Do you feel that no one loves you? Do you still feel rejected? If you do feel any of those things (and others), God wants you to feel His love and acceptance today.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us... (1 John 3:1 NIV)

He wants to lavish His love on you today, so that you will know you're His child. 'Lavish': He wants His love to just overflow, so that it almost seems wasteful, He's giving us so much love. Another version says:

See what an incredible quality of love the Father has given, shown us, bestowed on us, that we should be given, and named and called and counted the children of God (1 John 3:1 AMP).



We are called children of God, and that is who we really are. God's desire for us is intimacy with Him. The story of the prodigal son is a story of reconciliation back to the Father, and He wants us to experience that reconciliation and restoration of relationship today; not as a slave, or a servant, but as a son, with the full rights of sonship.

I believe that just like the father in that story, God wants to meet you with a hug. If you need a hug from the Father today, come to Him. If maybe you have never embraced the Father in a personal way, take that step today. He wants to hug you, and tell you how much He loves you, as His child. And allow the Holy Spirit to fill you, to shed that love abroad in your heart, so that you feel accepted, valued and appreciated; so that you feel loved.

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