

HONORING THE REAL GOD TO HONOR YOUR FATHER

An original article
by Jade Lee



JESUS, RESET MY FAMILY LEGACY

Jesus, remind me often of the love You have for me as my heavenly Father. Let my gratitude for how You love me empower me to strengthen and restore my relationship with my earthly father.

PREFACE

As we begin to ponder our need to honor God as our Father, it is hard not to think of our individual perspective of fatherhood. Our experiences with our earthly father most certainly inform our view of our heavenly Father.

IMPRESSIONS OF FATHERHOOD

We each have personal images intricately tied to the tender yet powerful word *father*. For some, the visualization of *father* is an always-smiling, ready-to-embrace-you, tender man who instantly promotes feelings of joy and acceptance. Others remember the massive, outstretched hand that seemed to pull a never-ending supply of candy from his trouser pockets. There are also those who hear the word *father* and conjure up images of a scowling, rumped

brow and disappointed frown that seemed to cut the heart of a child desperately longing for expressions of his approval. And finally, there are others who may simply draw a blank when they try to visualize a father. As empty as a fresh pack of computer paper, no matter how many pages they turn, the landscape is full of empty memories. No calls, no visits, no talks with dad.

No matter what impression the word *father* has left upon our heart, we are reminded of its significant presence in the pages of Scripture. We are lovingly exhorted to honor our Father in heaven and fathers on this earth (Deuteronomy 5:16). But *how* do we honor our father? This question is inevitable when one out of every three American children live in a home where their biological father is not present.¹



PRAY and Experience Scripture

Honor your father and mother, as the LORD your God commanded you ... (Deuteronomy 5:16 NLT)

Honoring your father includes fathers of all kinds: the attentive and neglectful, the kind and the abusive, the believers and the nonbelievers. The command is not conditional. Honoring your father requires faith to walk through the process of honoring. As you become an honoring person you may be uncertain about your father's response, but you can have faith and confidence in your heavenly Father's pleasure.

¹ James Nye, "1 in 3 children in the U.S. live without their father as number of two-parent households falls by 1.2m in ten years," DailyMail.com, December 26, 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2253421/1-3-US-children-live-father-according-census-number-parent-households-decreases-1-2-million.html>.

And finally, honoring your father presupposes intimacy with God. Fulfilling the command to honor your father will be impossible in your own strength. Only as you yield to the Holy Spirit will you find the prompting and power to truly honor.

Pray a prayer of humility. First, tell God about your willingness to obey His command to honor your father. Next, tell God about any hesitancy you have about showing honor to your earthly father. And finally, declare your reliance on the Holy Spirit.

God, I am committed to obeying Your Word, every part of it. You've commanded me to honor my father and mother, so I want You to know that I ...

I yield to Your command and at the same time, I am going to need Your help because ...

I am going to need Your Spirit to help me by...

How to honor our father is a loaded question. Therefore, we must venture back to ask, "Why should we honor our father?" before we can answer the first. As Christians, we desire to live our life based on the truth of God's Word. The Bible is our standard and foundation. When we wonder *why* we should honor our earthly fathers, we must first return to the Word of God and how it describes the perfect, admirable love of our heavenly Father.

Honoring the real God is the first step toward honoring our earthly fathers. And honoring God is easy when we are freed from any vision of a harsh, "finger-pointing" God and begin to see a

gentle, loving Father. Our hearts are enamored by His unconditional love the more our knowledge of who He is increases. And the more we come to know the true character of our heavenly Father, the more freedom we have as we look at our earthly fathers.

THE GOOD, GIFT-GIVING FATHER

Our heavenly Father is one of the three persons of the Trinity — the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 8:6 reveals that “to us there is but *one God, the Father*, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” God affectionately enters our world with a term we all can relate to on some level, choosing to introduce Himself to humanity as Father. He says, “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?*” (Matthew 7:9–11). Our heavenly Father is a good parent, a loving and attentive Father.



LEARN to Encounter Jesus

And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. (Luke 15:20 NLT)

Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the story of the prodigal son, but ask Him to refresh your experience of the Father in this well-known story. Read Luke 15:11–32, where the son demands his inheritance, lives a life of foolish choices, and then out of complete desperation and regret returns home to



his father. Notice the father's response. While the son was a long way off, the father saw him coming. Imagine the scene of a father who sits on the front porch, scanning the horizon, looking for any sign of his son returning home. You have a Father like that. He can't wait to be with you, can't wait to run off the front porch and embrace you. Pause for a moment and imagine the scene of the story, but this time, imagine Jesus running out to meet *you*. He is filled with love and compassion. He runs to you and embraces you because His heart is thrilled to call you His child.

What does it do to your heart to imagine a God who can't wait to be with you? Tell the Father about your gratitude:

Heavenly Father, when I imagine that You are scanning the horizon because You can't wait to be with me, I feel ...

When I imagine that You are running to meet me and embrace me with a heart of love and compassion, my heart is moved with gratitude because ...

God describes Himself as a positive, providing Father who joyfully wants to give us good gifts. The good news is that no matter what sin and separation has occurred between us, the power of the gospel reconciles us back to our Father and back into intimate relationship. If we have no context of "father" or if we have an inaccurate view of fathers, we now can learn about fatherhood through intimate conversation with God and the revelation of Scripture. We can be filled with the "good gifts" from the Father in heaven, even gifts that we may have missed in our formative years.

What kind of gifts might our heavenly Father provide to His children? What kind of gifts are in store for those who are called to be His children? The Father's gifts include the meeting of all our physical needs, spiritual needs, and even the relational needs of our lives. God provides his children the gifts of: acceptance, approval, appreciation, respect, comfort, security, support, attention, affection, and encouragement. The Father gives us all of these through the abundance of His multifaceted grace (see 1 Peter 4:10).

God's love for us as our heavenly Father and our perspective of Him as a good, gift-giving dad prepares us to be restored to our earthly fathers. As our hearts are healed of pain through the love of God our Father, we are prepared to honor our natural father. Our dad, however imperfect, can be honored as we reflect on our heavenly Father.



SHARE with Others in Community

Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father ... (James 1:17 NLT)

Talk with a prayer partner or small group about a "good gift" that has come from the Father to your life. Our gratitude for having received from our heavenly Father can reassure and empower our relationship with our natural father. Share your response to the following:

Recently, I've been especially grateful for God's gift of _____ in my life. He is a tremendous Father because He has given ...

My gratefulness for my heavenly Father's good gifts reassures me about my relationship with my earthly father because ...

HEALING A HARDENED HEART

It is very hard to honor our fathers, God, or anyone else when our hearts have been hardened. This reminds us of a biblical character named Pharaoh. The Bible says Pharaoh's heart was hardened against God (the Father). The missing element in Pharaoh's life was honor. He failed to yield, to give respect, or to honor the God of the Israelites. Pharaoh eventually gave honor to the Lord, but it was at his own expense.

When our hearts become hardened due to life's difficulty or pain, we must remember that honor is a choice. We don't have to remain forever calloused. Multiple times in my own relationship with my father, the Lord has convicted me about three acts of love. He has asked my hardened heart to express love as I forgive, confess, and restore.

I've had to forgive my father, confess that I was wrong for holding anger and resentment against my dad, and then make a commitment to restoring him back to his rightful place in my life. This process has not always been easy, but in return for my obedience, I've seen my father travel for hours just to kneel at my feet, weeping words of godly sorrow.

It was through my place of humility that God brought healing, restoration, and the healthy relationship I desired. He wants to do the same for each of us as we listen to His leading. In fact, He promises to give us a softened, loving heart if we receive by faith, saying, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26).

So go and be bold; don't be afraid to exemplify love, because you will be glad you took a step of faith. Even if your father does not respond the way you desire, you will be able to say you have

obeyed a very important part of God's Word, and your heavenly Father will always be there to carry you.

LOVE Others in Community

That it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 5:16 NIV)

Ask the Holy Spirit to prompt you with any needed areas of change in your life. Ask Him:

- Is my heart hardened? Do I need more humility or a new heart from You? (Ezekiel 36:26)
- Is there any forgiveness that You want me to show to my father?
- Is there anything that I need to confess to You or to my earthly father? Search me, Lord, and know my heart ... (Psalm 139:23).
- Is there any restoration needed in my relationship with my father?

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the answers, and then make plans to live out anything He reveals.

Talk to others who don't know Jesus about the transformational power of our heavenly Father.