

My Father Is ...

Pastor Ken

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So many live with a gap between going to heaven and knowing God as their heavenly Father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. (Luke 15-NIV)

I heard a beautiful story this weekend from one of our church members, who with fond and fabulous memories described how wonderful her father was. He has since passed. But the memories poured out as she recalled his strength, personality, and most of all his love.

And many listening to my voice can repeat that story. A dad who was faithful to your mom. A dad who attended your sports events, a dad who took you on long walks through the woods, a dad who bored you with the names of plants like Goats Beard and Bleeding Heart.

Dad seemed so patient as he taught you to read, tie your shoe and ride a bike. He laughed. He smiled. He was tough when he needed to be and tender when your heart broke at the passing of your favorite bunny rabbit.

Dad. Father. Pappa. Dada. Whatever you called him, he provided years of unending love, protection, acceptance, and grace.

I wish that the last description were true of me and many of you.

For so many, divorce took your dad out of the picture. Out of your life.

Workaholism kept your dad MIA, leaving him listed in the disinterested category.

Or maybe dad’s alcoholism leaving you growing up in a totally dysfunctional home, causing you untold pain.

Or as I sat with a best friend recently, a chaplain in Springfield, Missouri and listened to Daryl’s story of what happened to his life, a dad who passed while Daryl was in high school.

A life of rebellion, alcohol and drugs ensued, snaring my friend in a web of addictions, which would lead to the loss of a college scholarship at a prestige's southern California University, abandonment by friends, and total destruction of his health.

For so many of us, divorce, disinterest, dysfunction, even death or some other damage took our fathers out of our lives.

Or in my case debilitating mental illness, left me and my 5 brothers and sisters growing up in abandonment, welfare, project housing, food stamps and a life totally lived without a male presence in our childhood and formative years.

And this is why God as your Father, is providing so many of us supernatural healing experiences, as you grow in your faith and shore up the pain of your past.

And right before our eyes, we are watching God change the story of the fatherless generation and turn it into a generation loved by perfect Heavenly Father.

God wants to change the fatherless generation to a generation that understands they are loved and known by a perfect Heavenly Father.

One thing we all have in common, every person sitting here and watching on-line, **we long for a father's blessing.**

Each of us are hard wired to receive a Father's love, blessing, favor, and love. Everyone one of us wants our Father's blessing. When dad shows up at a ballpark, at a high school play, or even at your workplace, the child or young person comes alive looking and longing for approval.

It is that time of the year when football fields and stadiums will be filled with dads watching their kids, run out onto the turf and many give a wave, or tip their helmet in the direction of a dad, who is cheering them on in the stands.

And from the tiniest of pee-wee football kids to the elite stadiums of the NFL - muscular, wealthy, and brilliant athletes scan the stadiums seats looking for dad in the stands.

All of us were created by God to receive a Father's blessing, approval, and participation in our lives.

But for so many, that blessing is missing. I call that space between what should have existed and what didn't, I call it-the gap. And to not have a father's participation, a father's affirmation, a father's presence, leaves a gap in the lives of so many.

A gap filled by rebellion. A gap filled by running away. A gap filled with risk taking.

For many of you, you have enjoyed a life filled with the satisfaction that a dad believes in you. If that is you, text your dad. Tell your dad, thanks for believing in me. Call him.

For others, not so much. Because of the “not so much,” a gap is left. So many live with a gap between going to heaven and knowing God as their heavenly Father.

Since my life was filled with a gap. I have learned that you can either fake it or face it.

When dad’s participation is not there, it leaves a gap.

When dad’s approval is not there, it leaves a gap.

When dad’s presence is not there, it leaves a gap.

That is why I am doing the series, **My Father Is...**so we can face the reality, close the gap. Even the best father’s fall short, but we have, through Jesus Christ, a perfect Heavenly Father.

And the bible presents a picture of that perfect Heavenly Father in Luke 15.

¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. (Luke 15-NIV)

In a distant land a wayward son is sowing his oats. Back at home, a father is feeding his goats.

In a distant land a son is spending his wealth, back at home a dad is saying to himself, “I hope my son is ok?”

In a distant land a son is experiencing a famine, back at home a dad is eating salmon.

In a distant land a son was busted, disgusted, and could not be trusted, but back at home a father waited, worried, and worshipped.

The son went away saying, “give me.” (Luke 15:12)

The son returned saying, “make me.” (Luke 15:19)

Suddenly, there is an unforgettable blow to the father-son relationship. And instead of playing catch, the younger son is playing catch up, on what he has been missing living in a boring home without freedoms.

Dad was worth a lot, he has servants who are always ready to throw a massive party with rings, robes, expensive shoes, steaks, dancing, music, and opulent celebrations that go long into the night.

Dad, doesn't say take a hike, I will pass on my wealth when I am good and ready." He listens to his son. He doesn't preach. He hears what the boy is requesting.

That is a lot of money. That is a big gamble. This will be the most money the younger son has ever had in his pocket. Dad knows whether he can manage it well. He is a father whose wealth has not made him worry, but man whose wealth has made him wise.

So, he releases the younger son's portion. It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. (Luke 15:13-MSG)

After a few days the NET bible says in verse 13, the younger son packed all of his belongings and moved out.

What happened between the time the boy got his wealth and inheritance? When you read your bible, you should always enter into the story.

So many young people would be making big plans. Contacting a few friends and getting ready to bust out of jail.

If I were the dad, I would be making plans to have a conversation with my son about how to manage finances. Telling him what is beyond the Shire. There are Lord of the Ring-Orcs, beyond the safety of the fence line.

Dad knew what life was like in a distant country. His son did not. He was as green as they come about life in the world. The boy hangs around for a few days. You would have thought the son would have gotten the cash and split the scene. The younger son was not angry at the father, he was just selfish.

A boy with a lot of money and no life experience is a lethal combination. I am convinced there was no begging the boy to stay, by dad. Dad's listen up, application is as important as meaning in this text.

And I have given you dads some meaning, now I want to give you some mentoring. The boy has money, and dad has an empty room. The boy has freedom. And dad has one less mouth to feed. The boy leaves with little fanfare and maybe no prayer.

But dad will pray, every day. Dad could care little about the inheritance and money he had given up. All he really cares about is the boy's safety. And he knows that sometimes, the cost of learning important life lessons for a child is a cost to his hard earned \$\$\$ and cents.

And like what Harrison Ford says to his son, in Star Wars 8, Kilo Ren, "So, long kid."

Now, far away from the familiar. In a distant land. He has had enough of home and family. Those tight surroundings. The hard working and driven dad. The older brother is always tattling on him. Too much Bible. Too much prayer. Too much faith and not enough freedom.

With that kind of money, the son draws a fast crowd. Others are ready and willing to enjoy with him the temptations turned into reprobations. Money turned into memories. Dad's hard-earned wealth slipped through the boys' fingers as fast as he could get it.

3 Strong Verbs describe the scene-

Squandered-he scattered his wealth as one scatters seed. He spent it until the money ran out.

Prodigal-he lived in a manner that was the opposite of his family upbringings.

Longed for help-to be in need-he got so low that he began to suffer at every level. Mentally he was falling apart with depression.

Physically he was losing weight. Fearfully he felt unsafe. And spiritually he felt alone with no safety net.

Pain. Pain. And more pain. Pain is God's tool to break a stubborn heart.

God often plants a flag of pain, on the hill of the heart of a rebel.

About the time the money ran out, a famine hit the land. It goes from bad to worse, from worse to impossible, from impossible to insanity. How did an honor roll student, top-tier athlete, youth group president fall into such a hole? And a hellhole at that?

¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. (Luke 15-NIV)

Do you know who is surprisingly missing from the story? The father. He did not run after the boy. He did not send out a search party. No messaging. No texting.

He did not take responsibility for his boy's irresponsibility. He did not say, "I am going to change all of the rules and standards, just come on back home." Things are going to change around here. He did nothing like that. None of that.

Dad is home. Dad is secure. Dad is willing to wait. And we read ...no one gave the young man anything. (vs 16). No assistance from Convoy. No care packages from home. All the boy had was the clothes on his back.

Dad keeps waiting. Dad keeps praying. Dad keeps watching. Sun rise and sun set, dad looking for that familiar walk. Silhouette.

How long? We are not told.

Dad does not panic. He doesn't gossip about his son. He does not believe what he hears about the boy. People for centuries have been impacted by this text, like no other. Some of you have been sitting in silence, some spellbound. So appropriate. And the story gets even better as we will see. Let's see what kind of Father, the boy goes home to:

Your Father notices you. *(Luke 15:20)*

When you are lost. When you are depressed. When you are broken. When you are angry. When you are depleted. Your Father notices you. Your Father sees you. Your Father wants you.

What turns the situation around? What gives you hope? What brings joy back into your life? One word-Father.

Is there a dad you need to thank because he notices you? Is there a dad you need to ask for forgiveness? Do it now. Do it today. Do it before he slips into eternity.

Your Father possesses compassion for you. *(Luke 15:20)*

Your father has compassion on you. Perhaps you have made some egregious mistakes. He is ready to lift your head. Hold your hand. Hug your neck. His compassion drips from his soul.

Your Father runs toward you. *(Luke 15:20)*

The whole town is expecting dad to discipline the boy publicly. To do it thoroughly. And then to place him amongst the servants. Dad totally shames himself, before a son that has so much shame, he can hardly stand it. But dad runs. Dad hugs. Dad kisses.

Your Father embraces and kisses you. *(Luke 15:20)*

When you come to the Father, he will take you as you are. With all of your filth. Rebellion. Ugliness. You cannot begin to clean yourself up. This is what he does. That is what embraces, hugs and kisses are for.

The Father did not ask the boy to take a shower, or bath before he hugged and kissed him. Dad hugged and kissed the boy, filth, and all. Grace has its own cleansing powers. Grace has its own cleansing properties.

Your Father fully restores you to his image with a ring, robe, and sandals.

Is there a celebration awaiting your return? Not probation, but celebration. One of the best words in the whole story is Quick!

Quick, get the robe. Quick, get the ring. Quick, get the sandals. Quick, start up the grill. ²² *“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. (Luke 15:22-NIV)*

Come on servants. No delay. This is what we have been waiting for, praying for, and planning for. *I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. (Rev 3:17c-NIV)*

One final question, is there a heavenly Father you need to return to? My prayer for those who are running, that God will keep you financially busted, living in total collapse, until you return into a Father’s forgiving arms of love. You don’t have to go through anymore pain. Come home to the only perfect Father.

Let me offer you a prayer to get that journey started. Then you finish in the ensuing days. Come to the I Have Decided Wall. Get Baptized. Begin to restore those broken relationships.

Father, Daddy. Daddy. Abba. Abba. I am not worthy to be called Your son, but I have now come home. I am so grateful for Your love story of a wayward son or daughter returning to You! Today I am grateful for Your grace, freely given without limit toward my rebellious heart.

I have wandered and squandered, but You have kissed and hugged.

I went and spent, but You have loved and lavished.

I have cried and repented, and You are celebrating and rejoicing.

Receive me today in Christ, not as a rebellious child, but as a redeemed Christ-follower. Thank You today for being my Heavenly Father. Thank You for loving me. In Christ’s name, Amen.