

Series: FAMILY STUFF. Staying True In Confusing Times

SUNDAY JUNE 17, 2018

BEST DAD EVER!

Luke 15

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1. Our culture has been **dead on right** in some areas. How many of you are glad for the public health care system we have--despite its flaws? I am! And our culture has been right about caring for the environment. Canada has been on the front edge this for years--cause we've been entrusted with **vast** natural resources! But we've been **dead wrong** about some things, too.

-Here's my question: **How did we get from here to here?**
You have to admit--two **very** different Dads!

-Now, here's my point--and I **do** have one.
Our culture has implied that it doesn't matter all that much if kids have a **Dad** in their lives--maybe because many **don't**. And that is **dead wrong!** All the research--**all of it**--makes it clear that both Moms **and** Dads have **huge** influence in their children's lives.

-To underestimate that is wrong and dangerous! Dads--it matters if you're **there**--and it makes a **massive** difference what you **do** when you're there. To love, accept, listen to, and support your children is **huge!**

- a. If you've listened to me speak much, you probably know how important my Dad was in my life. See, in the critical years of my life--when things could've really gone **either** say, the **Dad factor** is what kept me on track.

-Now, I realize that in **saying** this--some of you have a way different story than me. I **know** that! But see, for me--it wasn't just my earthly Dad, Clyde Davis, that made the difference. It was also the One Jesus called, our **Heavenly Father**.

- b. It took **both** of these Dads to make a difference. My Dad, maybe like some of yours, could fix almost anything. Me? I mostly injure myself trying--we have a joke about that in our family. But there were ways my earthly Dad **couldn't** help me--as much as he loved me.

-I faced leadership issues he'd never faced. I had a mortgage--he **never** had a mortgage! One of my final pictures of him in my mind was him sitting at the kitchen table, 80 years old, unable to help us as we moved he and my mother into their retirement home. But **He was still my Dad--and He was still a GREAT Dad!**

2. All of that brought me to this question; **What is it that makes a Dad GREAT?** What is it, this Father's Day, that would make you say, "I have a **great** Dad!" Does being a great Dad mean that you have no flaws--you know, make perfect calls on stuff--never get impatient as a parent? Man, I hope not!

-Does being a great Dad mean that you don't struggle or have problems--that you always make the **right** move, the **right** decision? That's not even **possible!**

- a. Are you a great Dad if you give your kids everything they want? My Dad was a **very** generous person! He even got me my first car--a 65 Rambler station wagon! Hey, I wanted a Mustang--but this did run, have 4 wheels, and get me where I needed to go.

Actually being a **great Dad** usually means that you **refuse** to give your kids **everything** they want, right? They'd kill themselves!

- b. Does being a great Dad mean that you **always** compliment your kids and make them feel like a million bucks no matter what they do? My Dad didn't! He once told me that if I kept eating butter on my Pop tarts, I'd grow giant boils on my butt! He told me that I girl I liked had a nasty disposition and had a nose like a kosher pickle! He had an **interesting** sense of humour!

-For me, having a **great Dad** meant that he sometimes told me things I **didn't** want to hear--like when he confronted me on my selfishness and warned me about my rebellion.

3. Here's what I think; I think the **greatest** Dad's tell the truth--even when it's tough, live with humility, have massive supplies of patience, treat you with respect--and love you unconditionally. Pride creates distance--but **humility**? It leads to greatness.

-When you add patience to humility, that makes a Dad safe to come to when you've **really** screwed up. Patient people **listen**--that is, they work hard to understand you and not humiliate you any further. If they're wrong--they have the humility to admit that.

-When you add **respect** to humility and patience--well, that gives you the confidence that you can trust them with your failures--that they won't keep regurgitating it--using it to flog you or shame you. Their respect gives you a sense of **worth** and **dignity**.

-And **this** is all encompassed with the word **love**. Love that makes us safe to be around is **unconditional** love, right? When we **know** someone loves us unconditionally, their feedback is safe. When they don't give us what we want--we know it's not because they're selfish. When someone **loves** you unconditionally--you know that they **forgive** you unconditionally.

- a. Know what all these things wadded up together are called? **Grace**. Grace means that we are accepted, respected, valued, listened to, forgiven and loved--**not** as payment for something we've done--but because of the kindness, the love, the character and the devotion of the one **giving** it.

-Here's what I know--the word grace tends to be over-used--but it is the most beautiful, most attractive, most sought-after thing in the world. Everyone knows when they've been touched by it. And **grace** is what makes a Dad **great**.

- b. Here's what you need to know in a place like this; **grace** is the message of God to this world. **Grace** describes Jesus, what He was like--and what He did--and the way He lived.

-It always seems to surprise people when they find out that God is **not** about laws and rules--but about **grace!** A combination of love, kindness, patience and humility! That's a good thing cause, see, **I need grace!**

4. And this is exactly how Jesus describes our **Father in Heaven**. Father...or **Dad...** was Jesus most-used metaphor to help us understand God. He said that He was **sent** by the Father--on a **mission** for the Father--that He said and did **only** what the Father told him to say and do. To cap all this off, he said that he was **One** with the Father.

-What's strange is that people in our culture--maybe even some of you--would say, "You know--I **love** and **admire** Jesus--but I'm not sure about the God of the OT." Jesus once said, "That's **Who I AM**"--clearly stating that **HE** is the God who spoke to Moses. That to **see Him** was to **see the Father**.

- a. Jesus took the metaphor about the Father way too far for the religious professionals of his culture. Especially when He called Him **Abba** or **Papa**. Out of fear, the priests and Pharisees wouldn't even use God's **Name**--for fear of misusing it.
- b. But Jesus changed that. And He brings **Abba** into everyday life. He tells us, "Why would you worry about crazy stuff like money, clothes, and food when **Abba**--who owns and controls everything--who is **watching over you?**" Don't you realize **Who He is?** that He even knows how tall you are--or aren't--and how many hairs you have on your head!

-He cares about design and color. He's **so** great that can take care of sparrows and lilies--**and** us. Jesus says, "Why would you worry about stuff like that when you have the **Best Dad Ever**--Who loves you more than you would **every** dream!

- d. The question is...**why?** Why would the God who runs everything want to be **my** Dad--and **your** Dad? The answer doesn't make sense to many--but it's simple. **Love!** Every Dad and Mom knows what that feels like. And **that is** why--even though we **wanted nothing to do with Him**--the **Father** sent Jesus--His **Son**.

-Why do we run from Him? Why do we push Him away--doubt His motives? Sometimes it's because of bad experiences we've had with our earthly Dad.

But it's mostly because we don't understand love. That **real** love never tries to control people or run their lives.

5. Today I simply want to close with the best **Dad** story Jesus ever told. It's of a Dad with a son who rebelled and totally lost his way. Most of us look at the father in Jesus' story and think, "I wish **he** was **my** Dad!" Jesus paints the whole picture with just a few phrases:

"A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his

fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

“When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.”’

So he returned home to his father. 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. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’”

“But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.” (Luke 15:11-24 NLT)

-This morning, I want to take a few moments in closing to talk about the Dad in this story. With just a few details, Jesus tells us that he was a farmer--like a lot of people in Galilee--and apparently quite wealthy.

-But we primarily see him through the eyes of his sons; the good, hardworking obedient son--and the son who flipped him off and left home. It's the younger son who comes to the point where he can't stand the farm **or** his Dad. So, he in essence demand that his Dad either sell or mortgage the farm so he can get what he wants right away. So he does--and then he takes off.

- a. In our culture it's hard to understand just how unthinkable this was. As Jesus was telling the story I'm guessing that there was gasps; people saying, “**Really? No! You've GOT to be kidding!**” I'll tell you why; what he did and what he demanded would be the equivalent of saying, “Dad--I **wish you were dead!** But since you're still alive, let's **pretend** you're dead--and at least advance me the cash!”
- b. To then **take** that money to **another** country and **blow** it on a wild lifestyle was another slap in the face.

This time, he's not just defying his Dad and disowning his family, he's flipping off his heritage. To find out that this kid wound up starving, alone, and feeding pigs--was proof that **God** hated this kid too. In one of our movies, this would be where Liam Neeson takes out his daughters kidnappers. It would be the **FINALLY!** moment in the movie!

- c. But Jesus, who **knew** the Dad really well--wasn't done with the story. The son clearly starts to at **least** feel sorry for himself and think, “how am I going to survive this?” Let's be clear, it's **not** a wave of nostalgia he's feeling. It's desperation. **Starvation. Stuck-ness!**

-And it's **then** that he begins to compare how **his** boss treats him--and how his **Dad** treats workers. They **all** had plenty to eat. As he thinks about going home, he tells himself, “It's at least worth a shot!” As he sets off, he begins thinking about what he's

going to say. See, that could be the key to his next meal. He edits it down to his final draft where he admits his sin--and just asks for a job.

- d. And it's **here** that the story shifts from an ungrateful, rebellious son to the **grace** of an **extravagantly loving and forgiving Dad**. What's fascinating about this story Jesus tells is that this son never makes it to the front door. It's clear that His Dad has been **watching** for him--and immediately recognizes him from a distance.

-The people listening to Jesus tell the story would've thought, **Why would he watch for a son who flipped him, cut out his heart and served it up to him?** But the story gets even **more** outrageous!

The Dad hitches up his robe and **runs to meet him**. No Dad would **ever** run in that culture--let alone to meet a son who disgraced him and the family name!

- e. And then this Dad humiliates himself even **further!** He falls on this son's filthy, sweaty neck--kisses him--and as his son is **asking for a job**--tells the servants to **re-instate him as a son**. To bring him the **best** robe, sandals--and the family signet ring. And he's **restored** as a beloved son.

-The Dad's unforgettable words have echoed down through history as a definition of unconditional love.

'We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' (Luke 15:24 NLT)

6. This story **forever** defines grace. Justice means that you **get what you deserve**. In this kid's case, starving to death while you make the pigs **fat** as a slave in a far country!

-**Mercy** means that you get **less** than you deserve; "Son, I feel so **bad** for you--so I'm going to let you work for me. You will be treated fairly--but you will be at the bottom of the food chain."

-But **grace? Grace** means that this son gets what he **never could deserve**--given what he did to the family. He is fully embraced by his **Dad's** love and brought back into the family--full status. And **then** there's the party--a statement to the whole countryside, "My **son is home**--and I **love Him!**"

And if what Jesus is telling us is true--and it is--then **all of Heaven throws a party when anyone lost to the Father returns home--no matter where they've been!** And today's baptism is just a **taste** of that party!

- a. Just a couple of notes about what happened here--and what it means for us. You've heard me say, right, that there are three stages to forgiveness.

*First, it takes **one** to forgive. This Dad **chose** to forgive--long before he saw his son on the horizon. That's what God asks **us** to do--because that's what **He** does. It's the only path to freedom when we've been hurt.

*Second, it takes **two** to reconcile. If the son hadn't come home, he would've never realized that he had been forgiven. And when his Dad came running toward him--it was clear that he was determined to reconcile.

*But **grace** is even bigger. Grace offers **restoration**. How many of you have ever **restored** something.

My wife, Lori, loves to restore antiques. What that means is that something old, worn-out, and wrecked is made **new**. Better than it was when it was brand new.

- b. Let me describe **restoration** for us. It's where people like me--and people like you--flip God off, defy His wisdom, and push him away. But we end up in some pig-sty--and think, "I wonder if God still loves me?" And when He...**Dad**...runs to meet us and holds us close, all doubts leave our mind. And we are **restored!** The life comes back into our hearts--and hope is rekindled.

-See, **that's what the best Dad's do!** The **best** Dad's, like **their** Heavenly Dad...Abba, have generous, kind, forgiving hearts.

The **best** Dad's know what forgiveness and mercy and grace is like--and feel compelled to live that way.

- c. The **best** Dad's love grace. The **best** Dad's are not just generous with their time and generous with their humour and generous with their money and stuff--they're generous with what kids need most. Second chances. Forgetfulness when it comes to slights, mistakes and grudges. The **best** Dad's are stingy when it comes to fear--and **generous** when it comes to courage and trust!

7. But this story isn't just about **one** son--it's about two sons--the good responsible son and the rebellious irresponsible son. And it's not just about this big party, the night throbbing with music, the smell of barbecued beef in the air. Jesus story is about a sullen, angry son who's worked the fields till late--and can't **stand** his rebel brother. Forgive? Reconcile? Restore? Show grace? **Not on your life! Things have gone way too far for that to every happen!**

-What becomes clear as this story continues is the resentment that had been festering all along in the older son's heart. To **him**--his Dad--the **best Dad ever**--was too stingy to even spare a goat for him to have a night on the town with his buds. To **him?** Why, he was the **responsible deserving** son who, even though he would inherit everything, didn't think it was enough. And in it all, his hatred and disgust for his younger brother--and grudge against his Dad's grace--becomes clear.

-The **irony** of course, is that this Dad who lost his first son to a potentially unforgivable situation--loses his **second** son to a lethal cocktail of unforgiveness and contempt. The last scene is with the **best Dad ever** and his bitter, angry son. Join the party! His **lost, dead son is now found! Alive!**

- a. What becomes clear, in this story Jesus told, is that most people find themselves somewhere here--either in one of the two sons--or maybe the Dad.

*If you've hung around religion most of your life, you may find yourself in the older son. Responsible. Worked the fields. Never demanded anything. But in your heart is a subtle resentment toward the rebellious. Toward the people who **chase stupid** and **catch** him--cause he's slow and fat!

-And when they want to come home, your thought is, "**They** don't deserve all this?" And the Father might say, "Neither do **you!** It's called **grace** on both sides! The **best gift ever** to receive **and** to give--is **grace!**"

- b. You might be the son--the child--who's made a lot of dumb, selfish moves. No one saw you, but in the shadows you've flipped the "old man" off hundreds of times. In the far country, your rebellious thought is, "**I'll make it big in pigs!**" But you wonder in your heart of hearts, "I wonder if He'd take me back--I'm **sick** of this!"
- c. I'd recommend **grace**. See, **grace** is the most beautiful thing you can ever experience. Every person is only **one** step away from a **Dad** who's running for you--arms open. Grace is the best gift ever. Grace is holy. Grace blesses those who give it--and those who receive it. The caveat? Those who **receive** it--are called to **give it!**

-And in one word, that's what days like this are all about. And if you want grace and need grace--you can receive it--right now!