

“I WILL BE
A FATHER
TO YOU,”

says the LORD Almighty.



by Pastor Mike Harding

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God wants you to know and experience for yourself that His heart for you is the heart of a Father. And God will not be an impersonal Father, but He is a good Father who loves you deeply and wants to have a close and personal relationship with you.

Your image of God

What is your image of God? What is the image of God that most people have of Him? What is the image of God that even most Christian believers have?

Many people think of God as the Creator. He made the Heavens and the Earth. (Genesis 1:1) That's true, but it's not very close or personal. Many Christian people see Him as a holy and all-powerful God. That also true. Most Christians also see God as the One who will some day be the Judge of every human soul. (Hebrews 12:22-24) That's also true. He is the Judge, and He will judge. But what many don't understand is that God does not want to judge us. He created us. He loves us. He wants to save us. He has made the full provision for our forgiveness and our salvation through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Righteousness and justice is part of God's nature, but He does not really want to condemn anyone. God's desire is that all men be saved. (1 Timothy 2:1-4) But many reject God and His salvation. Some day, He will judge. But judgment is not a revelation of God's truest nature. Judgment is just something that He must do one day to finally rid the world of evil and sin.

But the truest revelation of God's heart and God's nature is that He wants to be our Father. God's heart is the heart of a Father. When you accept God as your Father, and when you come to know Him as your Father, then you begin to see God as He truly is. Then you know and experience the true heart of God. If your relationship with God is only Creator and creation, that's not God's best for you. If your relationship with God is Judge and

judged, that's not God's best for you. If your relationship with God is Master and servant, that's a little better, but that's definitely not God's best for you either. The relationship that God most wants to have with you is Father and son, or Father and daughter. And not just a son, but a beloved son! And not just a daughter, but a beloved daughter! Father and son/daughter is the highest relationship that we can have with God. It's the relationship that He wants for us. It's the relationship that He invites us into. It's the only relationship that truly satisfies the Father-heart of God. It's what you were created for!

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." Luke 3:21-22

In Luke 3:21-22, we read about the baptism of Jesus. He was 30 years old, beginning His ministry as God's promised Messiah. In these verses, we see all three members of the Trinity revealing themselves in a beautiful relationship. God is one God - Jehovah (Deuteronomy 6:4) . But He exists eternally as a three-part Being - a Trinity. It's not too difficult to understand. In Genesis 1:26, God said, *"Let Us make man in Our image..."* If God is a Trinity, and if we are made in His image, then we also are three-part beings. You are one person, but 1 Thessalonians 5:23 says that you are made up of three parts: spirit, soul and body. In the baptism of Jesus, we see Jehovah God revealing Himself in an amazing way. The first Person of the Triune God stayed in Heaven. He is the Father. The second Person of the Triune God came to Earth as the man Jesus Christ. He is God incarnate - God clothed in a human body like us. He is called the Son of God because He is a human being like us, with a human mother like us. But His only Father is God.

He was divinely conceived by a believing young virgin named Mary and the miraculous touch of God's Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit. He is the third Person of the Triune God.

At the baptism of Jesus, the Triune God revealed Himself as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit - all at the same time. Heaven opened. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, anointing Him with power to begin His ministry as the promised Messiah. And God the Father spoke in an audible voice from Heaven and said, "You are My beloved Son..."

This is beautiful! Why did an all-powerful God manifest Himself and reveal Himself as a Father and a Son? Why did the Father not say, "You are the Messiah"? Why did He not say, "You are the Savior of the world"? Why did He not say, "You are the King of kings"? No, instead, He said, "You are My Son - yes, My beloved Son!" Why did God do this? The only way to understand this is to understand that God is love. (1 John 4:8 & 16) God is love, and everything God does is motivated by love. God's truest heart is the heart of a good Father.

Why did God do this? He did it so that He could invite us into this Father and Son relationship. He invites us to become sons and daughters also, and to take our place in His family as beloved sons and daughters at Jesus' side. He did it because He wants to be our Father. He wants you to put yourself into this picture with Jesus. God wants you to hear His voice from Heaven saying to you also, "You are My beloved son," or, "You are My beloved daughter."

My story

I received Jesus as my Savior when I was 22 years old. I was an alcoholic, and I had a big empty place in my heart that was hungry for the love of a father. When I was two years old, my birth father went to prison. My mother divorced him, and I never saw him

again. When I was three, my mother remarried. My step-father was a good man, and he was good to me. But my mother was an alcoholic, and my home was often not a happy place. They divorced when I was about 11 or 12 years old. I stayed with my mother and my three younger sisters. As I grew up, I felt a deep emptiness and a need for the love of a father. I wished that I could have a father that would say to me, "You are my son. I love you." Whenever I would see a father playing baseball with his son in a park, I would feel deep pain and rejection and envy. I started drinking at fifteen years old. By the age of 21, I was in Alcoholics Anonymous, trying to stay sober and change my life. I started seeking God, and I started to have encounters with the presence of God. A friend in AA also started talking to me about Jesus. At 22, I accepted Jesus Christ and became a Christian. I felt God's love come into my heart. It was wonderful! But I still felt hungry to feel the love of a father.

God impressed on me to start reading the Bible, so I did. He led to me to read the story in Luke chapter three about the baptism of Jesus. I thought, "What a beautiful thing it is that the Father would say to Jesus, 'You are My beloved Son.' How beautiful for Jesus. But what does that have to do with me? I don't have that!" But the Holy Spirit kept whispering to my heart, "Read it again. Read it again." It took time, but I began to understand. I began to feel that God was speaking to me - that God was saying to me, "You are My beloved son also. I love you. Now, I am your Father also." It sounded too good to be true! But could it be true? What right did I have to believe that those beautiful words were for me also? What right did I have to believe that I could stand beside Jesus and call myself a beloved son of God? But God showed me the answer. The answer is in the Bible!

But as many as received Him (Jesus), to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

John 1:12

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God...Beloved, now we are children of God! 1 John 3:1-2

Romans 8:29 says that Jesus will be the firstborn among many brethren. John 3:1-7 reveals that Jesus came so that we could be reborn by God's Spirit as sons and daughters of God.

God wants you to take your place at Jesus' side as a born again son or daughter of God. He wants you to receive those beautiful words into your own heart and soul. God says to you also, "You are My beloved son," or, "You are My beloved daughter." You have that right!

I will be a Father to you

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:16-18

In 2 Corinthians chapter six, God tells us to "come out from among" all idols and false gods. He tells us not to touch the unclean things that have to do with idols and false gods. God calls us instead to come to Him, for Him to be our only God, our true God. Then He makes an amazing promise to you. He says, "I will receive you." He promises you that His heart is open to you. His arms are open to you. He promises that He will not reject you. "I will receive you." That's a promise!

Then He makes you an even better promise. He says, "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters." God is saying that this is the relationship He wants to have with you. This is the relationship that He is inviting you into. This is the desire of His heart. This is the relationship that will satisfy the heart of God. His heart is a father's heart, and He wants you to be His beloved. That's why the Triune God became a Father and a Son. He did it so that you also could become His beloved son or beloved daughter.

If someone gives us an invitation, we need to respond to the invitation. We need to accept or reject the invitation. If someone offers us a gift, we need to accept or reject it. If we don't accept it, it isn't really ours. In the same way, God has given us an amazing invitation. He wants us to respond. He wants us to say "YES" to His offer. He wants us to say, "Yes, I come to You. I accept You as my Father."

What good fathers give their children

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height --- to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:14-19

In Ephesians chapter three, we see the things that a good father will give to his children. These are things that God gives us also - things that He will give us more and more if we ask Him.

Identity - *"from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named..."*

God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is also the Father of the whole family in Heaven and Earth. We are that family - all of God's born-again sons and daughters. Fathers give their children the family name. For good or for bad, that name becomes part of their identity. If you are born as a member of a royal family, that family name is a source of identity and strength to you all of your life. If you have a strong, positive sense of identity, you are a stronger person. If you do not have a strong, positive sense of identity, you are likely to be a weaker and more insecure person for it. Insecure people are always looking for acceptance and validation from outside of themselves. Good fathers give their children a strong identity and a sense of belonging and a good reputation and a good heritage.

Strength and confidence - *"strengthened with might..."*

Good fathers pour into their children a sense of strength and confidence. They encourage their children. They help their children feel that they can be successful at whatever they do. They give their sons and daughters a good foundation to have success in their lives. Good fathers try to give their children a model and an example of successful living. If children see their father being successful, they will be able to dream of success for themselves. They will have a vision for success. They will have an image of success in their minds. They will have more confidence. They will be able to set goals, learn skills, take risks, and work hard at whatever they choose to do. If children do not get an image of success from their fathers, the children may struggle with an image of failure or poverty in their minds. It may be very hard for them to believe that they can ever be successful.

Their time and their presence - *"that Christ may dwell in your hearts..."*

Good fathers give the gift of their time and their presence to their children. They spend time with their children. They talk to them. They listen to them. They teach them new skills. They do fun

things together. A father who spends time with his child is sending a message into the heart of that child. The message is: "You are worth my time. You are worth loving. You are important to me." The child will believe that message, and will feel good about himself or herself. A father who will not give his time or his presence to his child is also sending a message. The child will come to believe that they have no real value - that they are not worth loving or spending time with. They will learn to feel bad about themselves.

Love - *"rooted and grounded in love..."*

Good fathers love their children. They make their children feel loved. Children are born with a need for love. Their hearts are like little empty tanks. Just like a new car needs to be filled with gas in order to travel, a child's heart needs to be filled with love every day. A child who feels loved will thrive and prosper. A child who does not feel loved will feel rejected and will struggle in life. Good fathers show affection to their children. They hug and kiss their children. They say, "I love you." They also show love by correcting and disciplining their children in a healthy way.

God wants to give you all these things. And He will, if you accept Him as your Father. Maybe you had good parents and a good family that gave you all these things. But maybe not. Maybe you have places in your heart right now that still feel empty. Maybe you still feel the need of a good father to give you identity and strength and confidence and love. God wants to do that for you. He will if you ask Him. He will if you go to Him and spend time in His presence. I know, because He did it for me. He filled me with His love. He healed my heart.

God will give you a strong sense of your new identity in Christ. He will teach you who you are now. You are a beloved son or daughter of God. That is your first and highest identity, now and forever. We all need to feel important. God made us that way. But

please do not look to your job or your title or your career or anything else to feel important. You are important right now. You are important because you are a beloved son or daughter of God! God will strengthen you and give you confidence. God will give you an image and a model of success as you study the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus is our model. Jesus is our vision of success. God will be with you, and He will equip you and support you in whatever He calls you to do. He will help you overcome any fear or insecurity. He will fill you with His presence. He will fill you with His Holy Spirit and spend time with you. He will pour His love into your heart every time you come to Him and open your heart to Him. He will heal you from any pain or rejection or disappointment of the past if you ask Him to. He will help you to believe and experience that you are His beloved son or daughter. And you will begin to prosper in your life because of it.

Spiritual fathers and mothers in God's family

I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord...

1 Corinthians 4:14-17

We learn from the apostle Paul that the greatest ministry is to become a spiritual father or mother to other people in Christ. Paul said that many people want to teach or preach or speak into a microphone. Maybe it helps them to feel important. But few people really become spiritual fathers or mothers. A spiritual father or mother in the church is someone who really loves God's people. A spiritual father or mother makes greater sacrifices. A spiritual father or mother brings God's love and God's healing to people's hearts. A spiritual father or mother pours and invests

into other believers to help them become more victorious and more successful and more influential for Jesus Christ. God wants us to grow up and become spiritual fathers and mothers to others.

The problem in the church is that many pastors and leaders and preachers have not really experienced the Father-heart of God for themselves. Many pastors and preachers and leaders are just like I was. They have empty places in their hearts that did not get filled by the love of a father. They have deep wounds and emptiness and insecurity in their hearts. They want to feel loved. They want to feel confident. They want to feel a strong sense of identity. But they don't. In their hearts, they feel like orphans. They feel like orphans, and they think like orphans.

In order to become a spiritual father or mother to others, you must first experience what it means to be a beloved son or a beloved daughter of God. You must be healed. You must receive the Father's love for yourself first. If you feel like an orphan and think like an orphan, it will be difficult or impossible for you to become a spiritual father or mother to someone else. You cannot give what you do not have. And you do not have what you have never received.

"I will not leave you orphans"

"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." John 14:18

In John chapter 14, Jesus was talking to His disciples one more time before going to the cross. He was preparing them to understand that He was going to die, then rise from the dead, and then return to Heaven to be with the Father. But He told them that He would not leave them as orphans; He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them.

We all come to God as spiritual orphans. Man was separated from God because of sin. But when we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and God as our Father, we are no longer orphans. We are reborn as sons and daughters of God. But many Christians, and even many Christian leaders, still feel like orphans. They still think like orphans.

How does an orphan feel? How does an orphan think? We read in Ephesians 3:14-19 what good fathers give to their children. Beloved sons and beloved daughters receive and feel those things. But orphans don't feel those things. Orphans don't feel a strong sense of identity. They want to feel accepted by someone - by anyone. Orphans don't have inner strength or inner confidence. They feel afraid and alone. They may act strong on the outside, but they are deeply afraid. They don't feel that they have any hope of succeeding at anything. They have a vision of failure and poverty. They don't feel loved, and they don't even believe that they are worth loving.

Do you identify with any of these feelings? If so, God wants to heal you. He wants to be your Father. He wants to make you feel and experience that you are His beloved son or beloved daughter. He wants to fill your heart with His love and transform you completely. It doesn't happen in a day or a week or a month. But He will do it if you ask Him to. He will fill you and transform you if you come to Him as a Father and spend time with Him in His presence.

In the church, there are many leaders that feel like orphans and think like orphans. These people may be preaching the gospel and bringing people to Christ, but if they think like orphans, they will teach others to think like orphans also. People who think like beloved sons and daughter will teach others how to think like beloved sons and daughters also. Only beloved sons and daughters can really become spiritual fathers and mothers to

others. This is the law of Genesis 1:11. Everything will reproduce after its own kind.

Pastors and preachers and Christian leaders who become spiritual fathers and mothers will give love and identity and confidence to their own spouses and to their own children. And they will give love and identity and confidence to their disciples and to their congregations. This is true spiritual leadership. This is God's true ministry. Spiritual fathers and mothers offer real love that heals and transforms God's people.

Not slaves, but sons

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs --- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ... Romans 8:14-17

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Galatians 4:4-7

The Bible says that we are no longer under the Old Covenant. We are in the New Covenant. We are no longer under the law of Moses. We are redeemed. We have received the adoption as sons. We are now truly sons - not just adopted, but actually born again by God's Spirit. And because we are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. The Holy Spirit now lives inside us, and He testifies to our hearts that we are truly God's beloved

sons. He takes away the orphan heart, and He gives us the heart of a beloved son or daughter. In fact, the Holy Spirit in us gives us the voice to cry out, "Abba, Father!" Abba means "Papa". We have the voice in us to say "Papa" when we pray to God. This not disrespectful at all. This is love. This is intimacy. This is what God wants. This is why He sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. This is the relationship that satisfies the Father-heart of God.

Galatians 4:7 also says that we are no longer slaves, but sons. The people of Israel were once slaves in the land of Egypt. But God brought them out of slavery and into the Promised Land. All the people of the world were slaves to sin because of the sin of Adam and Eve. But God has redeemed us by the cross of Jesus Christ. If we believe in Jesus, we instantly become sons instead of slaves.

But sometimes Christians today think like slaves. They feel like they are slaves of God. Even some Christian leaders think like slaves. But God doesn't want slaves. He wants sons. Slaves only serve their master because they fear punishment. But sons serve their father because they love him. Slaves are motivated by fear. Sons are motivated by love. Perfect love casts out fear. (1 John 4:18)

Not servants, but friends

"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."
John 15:15

Right before He went to the cross, Jesus told His disciples that they would no longer be considered servants. Now, He is inviting them to be His friends. Jesus was talking about the change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. In Leviticus 25:55, God said, *"For the children of Israel are servants to Me; they are My*

servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God." But now Jesus is offering and new and better relationship. No longer servants, but friends!

Many Christians today think of themselves only as servants of God in the New Covenant. But this is not what God wants either. He wants sons and daughters. He wants friends. He wants His children to become His friends, close to His heart. Of course, we do serve God with humble and grateful hearts. But a servant has no love relationship with His master. A servant just obeys and serves. He asks no questions. But sons and daughters have a love relationship with their father. A servant only has value because he serves. But a son has value because he is a son. A servant does not have a place in the family forever. A son stays in the family forever. A servant is motivated either by reward if he serves well, or by fear of rejection if he does not serve well. A beloved son has no fear of rejection from his father. Our Father does not reject us! As sons and daughters in the New Covenant, we love God because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19) A son serves - and he serves better than any servant - because he loves his father. A son has an inheritance in the family. A servant has no inheritance.

Your image of yourself

What is your image of yourself, in relationship to God? Do you feel and think like an orphan? Do you see yourself as just a lowly servant of God? Or worse yet, do you see yourself as a slave to God? Or do you now see yourself as a beloved son or a beloved daughter of God?

God wants you to receive Him as your Father. He wants you to open your heart to Him and let Him love you. He wants you to come into His presence and spend time with Him. He wants you to receive your new identity as a beloved son or daughter. He wants you to ask for and receive His flow of strength, confidence

and love. He wants to transform your heart and your life. And if you are a Christian leader or pastor or preacher, He wants to put His Fatherly heart into you so that you can become a spiritual father or mother to other Christians also.

Receive Him now

If you want to accept God as your Father, and if you want to receive all the good things that He will pour into you, please pray now: God, I believe in Your Son Jesus Christ as my Savior and my King. He paid for the forgiveness of all my sins by His shed blood on the cross. I believe that He rose from the dead and is now seated at Your right hand in Heaven. God, I come to You now. You promised that you would receive me. You promised that You would be a Father to me, and that I would be your beloved son/daughter. I receive you and accept You now as my Father. Take me now as your son/daughter. I receive my new identity as Your beloved son/daughter. Please fill me with Your love. Please fill me with Your strength and confidence. Give me a vision for success in my life as Your beloved son/daughter. Please heal every wound in my heart. Please fill any empty place in my heart with Your love and Your presence. I will no longer identify as an orphan or a slave or even a servant. I am now Your beloved son/daughter, and You are my Father. Amen.



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