



# DON'T MISS OUT ON YOUR REAL FATHER

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**M**y father was a drunk. He was an executive (head of shipping) at a large textile firm with plants in Tennessee, North Carolina and Holland. He was also an amateur pool hustler who hustled the hustlers who came through our town. He would get a call from the pool hall that there was a new “gun” in town. My father would leave the office, go to the pool hall and, to the surprise of the hustler, leave the pool hall with considerably more cash than he had when he first came in.

“Your daddy,” a man told me once, “was the best pool player in western North Carolina—when he was sober.” I asked the man who was the second-best pool player. He laughed and said, “Your father when he was drunk.”

You may be thinking that my growing up years must have been horrible. Actually, you would be wrong. Do you know why? Because my father loved my brother and me with a passionate, unconditional, unrelenting, undeserved and unreserved love.

I wish I had the space to tell you stories; but whether it was defending us against unjust charges, standing with us when we were “guilty

as charged,” or showing our pictures to anybody who would look, his love and commitment to us was total.

At his funeral, there was a long receiving line and repeatedly, as people shook our hands, they said, “Do you boys know how much your father loved you?”

Years later when I became a Christian, I was reading the Bible (a book with which I was not yet that familiar) and I came across a passage where Jesus said,

*“Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?”* —Matthew 7:9-11

I remember the incredible joy with which I received Jesus’ words. I remember thinking that if my heavenly Father loved me just one-fifth as much as my earthly father, I was “good to go.” I never had to worry again about my being good enough to please him (he was already pleased because I was his son). I didn’t have to worry about my guilt

(he knew the bad things about me and loved me anyway). I could trust him with anything (his love would never allow him to be unmerciful, unkind or angry because I had offended him). In short, both my earthly father and my heavenly Father would never say, "I've had it with you."

A lot of years have passed. I thought I would be better than I am now, but I'm not. I thought I would eventually get to the place where I would be good enough to get my heavenly Father to love me, but it hasn't worked out that way. I thought my knowledge would please him and make him glad he made me his child, but every day in one way or another, I find out I got it all wrong. But God is my Father and it's okay. He, like my earthly one, never wavers in doing what good fathers do. He never changed and his Fatherhood—his love, mercy, grace and gentle discipline has been the most important and constant factor in my life.

I remember first reading the words of Jesus about the nature of a Father who "gives good things" to his children. As I read, I was overwhelmed again by a heavenly Father who revealed himself to us in Jesus. I found myself sometimes moved to tears and sometimes laughing the laughter of the free and loved.

Since then, I've thought a lot about both of my fathers. Shortly before his death, my father was in the care of a physician at a Seventh-Day Adventist hospital. The doctor said, "Mr. Brown, you have about three months to live. We're going to pray and then I'm going to tell you something far more important than what I just told you." He then led my father to Jesus Christ.

Do you know why it took my father so long to come to Christ? He didn't think he was good enough. My father would come to church only if we boys were in a children's presentation or occasionally for a church supper. But by and large, he stayed away from church. I never heard my father say bad things about church people or refer to them as "hypocrites" or such. He just didn't think he fit because he wasn't good enough to fit.

How in the world could my father get the

"main thing" about the Christian faith so wrong? I've asked myself that a thousand times. Didn't he listen? Was it that we just didn't say it right? Or maybe, do you think, we somehow got it wrong ourselves? Maybe we bought into the lie that the church is made up of good people (or at least "better people") whose main calling is to help others be as good as us.

For whatever reason, very early on in my ministry, I became passionate about telling people (saying it in a way that they could hear and understand) of a heavenly Father who loved sinners so much that he sent his Son to die for them. I've been driven to tell people that no matter who they are, what they've done, what they're smoking or drinking, who they're sleeping with or who they've hurt—they could come to Him.

I know. Some of you haven't had my experience with your earthly father. Almost every day I hear from people whose fathers were physically, verbally or sexually abusive, demanding, condemning and angry...fathers who could never be pleased no matter what. When I start talking about "fathers" you may wince. I get that, and I "taste the salt of your tears."

But don't miss out on your real Father. The very fact that there are bad fathers and we know it references a "knowing" that fathers aren't

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supposed to be like that. Somewhere there is a Father who is different—kind and gentle—a father who loves you not because of what you do or don't do, but simply because you are his son or daughter.

The angry among us will say, "Okay, God is your Father, but don't let it go to your head." Don't you believe them! God is your Father, so let it go to your head as much as you want. Laugh, dance, sing and be glad. ☐

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