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FATHERHOOD

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I became a Father on 27th April 1987. I've been one ever since. I'm still trying to work out what that means. My journey as a Father began holding a little baby in my arms. I know that biologically I was a father before that moment, but that was the moment it became real.

I realized that I have responsibility for this little life that Angie and I brought into the world. There have been different experiences of fatherhood along the way. Certainly the feelings associated with holding my child for the first time were somewhat different to the feelings I had in the middle of a two year old tantrum or a teenage rage. Sometimes being a father has meant that I need to give clear direction. Other times I need to listen carefully. Sometimes I stand in wonder at my children and who they have become. And sometimes I wonder what sort of father I have been – there are times when I am acutely aware of my failings – of the things I could have done differently. I was speaking to a friend who was doing a parenting course. She said that one insight from the course was that if you get it right 30% of the time as a parent, you're doing really well. I found that a comforting thought.

My Father seemed to know everything when I was little. He could do anything, fix anything and make anything. Then when I was a teenager it was amazing how much he had forgotten. I was pretty tough on my Dad when I was a teenager. I suspect I wasn't the only one. But thankfully, I grew up and was able to see my Father as an adult – not the bulletproof version he was in my childish imaginings, or the out of touch know nothing that he was in my teenage years – but a real person, who had doubts and fears and failings just like me. All in all, I'm glad he was my Dad.

And as I say that, I know that there are others who have had a pretty rotten experience of fathers. Fathers who abuse their children in one form or another. Fathers who are absent – either physically or emotionally from their home and their children. Fathers who for one reason or other simply can't act like a father for their children.

In the Bible, Jesus taught his disciples to pray. He taught them what Christians know as the Lord's Prayer. It begins with the words, "Our Father in heaven".

God identifies with us as Father. He wants us to pray to him as our Father.

I think that's a hugely significant thing. God doesn't ask us to pray to him as "the mighty one high above the clouds who we could never reach or possibly hope to understand". He wants us to call him our Father. It's a relationship term.

There's a word for God in the Bible for God that comes up a few times. It's Abba. Not the Swedish pop group in the 1970's. It's a word from the Hebrew language. It means Father, but it's a very familiar and playful word. It was the word used by young children for their Father. In English we would probably best translate it as "Daddy". In the Bible, Paul writes about this relationship that we have with "Abba"

He writes in Romans chapter 8: 15,16: By the Spirit's power we call God "Abba." Abba means Father. The Spirit himself joins with our spirits. Together they give witness that we are God's children.

So if God is our Dad, then we are his children.

Now the thing about children in a family – the thing about being a child of a Father is that we are then also heirs. Children are in the will. My children are in my will. It's kinda standard practice – unless you have had a serious falling out with your kids.

If we are God's children, does that mean that we have an inheritance?

Paul answers that question in another book of the Bible. He writes in Titus chapter 3: 5-7. He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

So, the inheritance we have from God our Father is the gift of eternal life.

An inheritance is not earned – but a gift.

In the same way, our heavenly father gives us the gift of eternal life – not because we have earned it or been good enough for it, but because of God's mercy shown to us in Jesus.

What a father.

Another thing about being a Father is that Fathers generally know how to give good things to their children. Sometimes we mess that up, but by and large Fathers won't give things to their children that they know will hurt them.

Jesus talks about this in a story from the Bible, He says,

"You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him." That's in Matthew chapter 7:9-11

We know good things to give to our kids. You don't have to be a parent to know that, either. So if we flawed human beings know how to give good things to our kids, can't we trust God to give good things to us, his children?

The reality is that sometimes kids ask for stuff that is not good for them. If you give a five year old the choice of meat and veggies for tea, or a bowl of lollies, which do you think they'd opt for? If they pushed back the plate of meat and veg and demanded a bowl of lollies, would you give it to them?

Good Dads aren't indulgent. They might say No – that's not good for you. They may say Wait – you can do that when you are older. Or they may say – you know what, I know you want "this" – but "THIS" (this other thing) is a whole lot better for you.

God isn't an indulgent heavenly Father, either. If we know that there are times when we have to say "no" or "wait" or "Here's something better" to our children, it shouldn't surprise us that God doesn't indulge us with our every whim and fancy.

Some people think that God doesn't really answer all our prayers. I reckon he does, but not as we might expect from our limited and distorted view of the world. God who sees clearly gives us what we really need. And his concern is mostly about our relationship with him, and receiving that wonderful inheritance he has in store for us. That's his deepest desire for us.

I'm glad to be a Dad. My kids give me a lot of joy.

I have a sneaking suspicion that our heavenly father is glad to be our Dad, too: and that we give him a lot of joy.

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