

Like a Father

A Father's Day Message on the Fatherhood of God

Psalm 103:13-17 · Luke 15:11-24 · Ephesians 3:14-19 · 2 Corinthians 6:18

No matter your experience with your earthly father, there is a Father who defines what fatherhood was always meant to be. Today, we encounter Him together.

A Room Full of Stories

Father's Day is one of the most emotionally loaded Sundays of the year. Walk into any church on this morning and you'll find a remarkable diversity of experience sitting shoulder to shoulder in the pews. There's the grown child who tears up because their dad was their hero. He showed up, stayed up, and never let go. There's the person quietly enduring the day because their father was absent, abusive, or somewhere between the two. There's the grieving son or daughter navigating their first Father's Day with an empty chair at the table. And there are dads in the room who love their kids deeply but feel, in the quiet moments, like they are barely holding it together.

Maybe you came in today carrying a warm memory - a dad joke that landed wrong, a fishing trip that became legend, a hand on your shoulder at exactly the right moment. Or maybe you came in carrying something heavier: a wound that never quite healed, a silence that stretched for years, or a longing for something you never fully received. Both experiences are welcome here. All of them belong in this room.

Because here is the truth that anchors everything we'll talk about today: **earthly fathers, at their very best, are only ever shadows of something greater.** They point, sometimes beautifully, sometimes painfully, sometimes by their absence, toward a Father who is the original. Today is not just about honoring the men in our lives, as right as that is. It's about encountering the One from whom all fatherhood gets its name.

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Four Portraits of the Father

Today we'll look at four distinct portraits of God's fatherhood drawn from Scripture. Each one speaks to a different place of need, and together, they paint a picture of a Father unlike any we have known or could imagine on our own.

1**He Sees You**

Psalm 103:13-14: Compassion without condition, love without performance.

2**He Runs to You**

Luke 15:20: A Father who moves toward us before we've cleaned ourselves up.

3**He Stays**

Psalm 103:17: Love from everlasting to everlasting, with no expiration date.

4**He Shapes You**

Ephesians 3:14-17: All fatherhood derives its meaning and its mission from Him.

The Father Who Sees You

"As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust."

- Psalm 103:13-14

There's a particular kind of pain in feeling unseen. It comes from performing, striving, succeeding, and still wondering whether the person who matters most to you actually notices. Many of us have carried that experience into adulthood, and some of us, quietly, have carried it into our relationship with God. We approach Him with résumés instead of hearts. We rehearse our failures before we even begin to pray. We assume His first move toward us is correction.

But listen to what the Psalmist says. God's compassion toward His children is not conditioned on their performance. The text goes deeper than feelings. It says **He knows how we are formed**. He remembers that we are dust. This is a God who is not surprised by your weakness. He is not disappointed in ways that cause Him to withdraw. He looks at the full picture of your frailty, your failure, your unfinished edges, and He moves toward you with compassion.

Picture a dad in the bleachers. His kid steps up to the plate, swings for the fences, and strikes out badly. The kind of strikeout where the whole dugout goes quiet. And the dad in the stands? He's already on his feet, already moving toward the fence, already saying with his posture: *That's still my kid. Nothing changed.* That is a glimpse, just a glimpse, of the God Psalm 103 describes.

i Application: If you've been keeping your distance from God, waiting until you're "good enough" to come close, this is your reframe. He already sees you, in full, and He is moving toward you. Not to correct. To love.

The Father Who Runs

"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."

- Luke 15:20

We tend to read the parable of the prodigal son and make it about the son: his rebellion, his rock bottom, his rehearsed speech. But Jesus told this story as a portrait of the Father. And the most explosive detail in the entire parable is this: **the father ran**. In first-century Jewish culture, a man of dignity did not run. Running meant gathering up your robes, exposing your legs, moving in a way that was considered beneath your station. It was, frankly, undignified. Scandalous, even.

That's the point. The father in this story does not wait at the door with crossed arms. He does not require the rehearsed speech to be completed before he responds. He sees his son "a long way off," which means he has been watching, scanning the horizon, *hoping*. Before the son can say a word, the father is already running. Already closing the gap. Already embracing what the village probably considered a disgrace.

This is the God Jesus came to reveal. Not a God who waits for you to clean yourself up, compose your apology, and arrive presentably. But a Father who has been watching for you, who sees you at a distance, and who **runs**. The shame you carry? He's already running through it. The years you've been away? He saw you coming before you turned around.

The Son's Expectation

Shame. Rejection. At best, a servant's position. He had rehearsed his lines and prepared for the worst.

The Father's Response

Running. Embracing. Celebration. A robe, a ring, a feast - full restoration before a single word of apology landed.

- ☑ **Application:** If you've been staying away from God because of shame - this parable is your personal invitation. The Father is not waiting with judgment. He is scanning the horizon, and He has already started running.

The Father Who Stays

"But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children."

- Psalm 103:17

Every earthly father, no matter how devoted, is limited. Limited by time, by distance, by illness, by death. The best dads in the world still have to leave, for work, for war, for a hospital room they can't come back from. There is an ache built into human fatherhood that no amount of love can finally fix, because human love is bounded by mortality. And for those who lost their dads too soon, or whose fathers were never truly present to begin with, that ache goes even deeper.

The Psalmist reaches for language that strains against every human limitation: **from everlasting to everlasting**. This is not poetic hyperbole. It is a theological declaration. God's love for His children has no beginning point, which means it predates your worst mistake. It has no ending point, which means it outlasts your greatest failure. There is no geography that removes you from it. There is no season of life where it goes dormant. His presence has no off switch.

For those in this room who are grieving a father, who are navigating life with an empty space where a dad used to be, this passage holds something sacred. The love that shaped you through your earthly father was always only a derivative of something original and eternal. What your father reflected imperfectly, God embodies completely. And He is not going anywhere. You were not made to be fatherless. You have a Father who is from everlasting to everlasting.



Earthly Fathers Are Finite

Limited by time, distance, health, and mortality, even the best dads eventually have to leave.



God's Love Has No Expiration

From everlasting to everlasting, His love predates your worst moment and outlasts your greatest failure.



You Were Not Made to Be Fatherless

Whatever your earthly experience, you have a Father whose presence has no off switch and no expiration date.

The Father Who Shapes Us

"I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name..."

- Ephesians 3:14-15

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 contains a stunning theological claim hidden inside a beautiful doxology: every family, every instance of fatherhood and kinship and belonging, **derives its name** from God the Father. This means fatherhood on earth is not the original. It is a copy, a reflection, a derivative of something that exists in the very nature of God. Earthly dads are not inventing the role from scratch. They are, whether they know it or not, imaging something holy.

This has enormous implications for the fathers in this room. You are not just a provider. You are not just a disciplinarian or a coach or a chauffeur. You are a living sermon about the character of God, delivered in real time to people who are watching more closely than you know. Your kids are forming their earliest instincts about what God is like from what they see in you, which is both a profound privilege and a weight no one should carry alone.

Here is the grace in this: the goal is never perfect fatherhood. It never was. The goal is **faithful fatherhood**, fatherhood that, in its best moments, reflects the Father, and in its failing moments, is honest enough to say so. One of the most powerful things a dad can model is a genuine apology. The moment a father looks at his child and says, "I got that wrong - I'm sorry" - he is preaching a sermon about humility, repentance, and grace that no Sunday school curriculum can replicate.

- ❏ **For Dads in the Room:** Your faithfulness, your humility, and your presence are a sermon preached every single day. You don't have to be perfect. You have to be *pointing* - toward the One who is.

What Faithful Fatherhood Looks Like

This is a moment to honor the dads in the room, not with empty flattery, but with honest encouragement. Fatherhood is one of the most demanding callings a person can live, and it rarely comes with clear feedback or immediate results. The seeds you plant now may not bloom for years. The apologies you offer may not be understood for decades. The consistency you bring, showing up when it's inconvenient and staying when it would be easier to check out, is quietly forming something irreplaceable in the people you love.

Be Present, Not Perfect

Your kids don't need a flawless father. They need a father who is *there* - physically, emotionally, spiritually. Presence is the foundation everything else is built on.

Let Them See You Kneel

When your children see you pray, ask forgiveness, or admit you don't have all the answers, they learn that strength and humility are not opposites. They are the same thing.

Point Beyond Yourself

The greatest thing an earthly father can do is make his children hunger for the Heavenly Father. Don't try to be everything. Point them to the One who is.

Trust the Long Arc

Faithful fatherhood is a long obedience. The fruit is often delayed. Keep going. What you are sowing today will matter long after you are gone.

Everything He Is, For You

We've walked through four portraits today, and they tell one unified story. The God of Scripture, the Father revealed by Jesus, proclaimed by Paul, and celebrated by the Psalmist, is not a distant, disappointed deity waiting to grade your performance. He is a Father who sees you in your dust and moves toward you with compassion. He is a Father who, when He spots you coming from a long way off, gathers up His robes and runs because dignity means nothing compared to having you home. He is a Father whose love stretches from before you were born to beyond your last breath, with no gap, no absence, and no expiration. And He is a Father who is actively shaping you through your wounds, your wonder, and your ordinary faithful days into someone who increasingly reflects His own likeness.

Whatever you came in carrying today, you are invited to put it down at the feet of this Father. If you came in with gratitude for a good earthly dad, let that gratitude expand. Let it travel all the way back to its source. If you came in with grief or a wound, let it be seen by the One who already sees it and does not flinch. If you came in as a dad who's not sure he's doing enough, let yourself be held by the Father who is more than enough, and who called you to this work knowing exactly what you bring and what you lack.

The door is open. It has always been open. And just on the other side of it, there is a Father who has been watching the horizon for you, and who is already running.

"You were not made to be fatherless. You have a Father who is from everlasting to everlasting - and today, He is for you."

An Invitation and a Blessing

In a moment of quiet, wherever you are, consider where you find yourself in today's message. There is no wrong answer, and no one is watching. This is between you and the Father.

If you need to receive His love today...

Perhaps you've been keeping your distance from God, from church, from yourself. Today is an open door. You don't need a rehearsed speech. You just need to turn around. He's already running.

If you're carrying grief or a wound...

Bring it into the open before a Father who is not overwhelmed by it. He sees your dust and your ache, and He moves toward you. Not to fix you quickly, but to be with you fully.

If you are a dad who wants to reflect Him more fully...

Ask for the grace to be present, humble, and faithful. You are not alone in this calling. The Father who called you to it walks with you in it.

If you've never known a father's love...

You were made for this. What you have been longing for your whole life is not a fantasy. It is a Person, and His name is Father. He has been waiting for you with open arms.

A Blessing Over This Room

To every father here: may you know that your faithfulness matters more than you can see, and that you are held by a Father who never grows weary of you.

To everyone who needed a father and found one in God: may His everlasting love be more real to you today than any absence you have ever known.

Go in the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Worship Suggestions: "Good Good Father" · "No Longer Slaves" · "Reckless Love" · "This Is My Father's World"

Preaching Notes & Practical Guidance

These notes are offered for the pastor or teacher carrying this message into a specific congregation. Every church is different — use these as tools, not rules. The outline is designed with flexibility in mind, and the suggestions below reflect what tends to work in a broad range of evangelical and mainline Protestant contexts.

Length & Pacing

This message runs comfortably at 35 to 45 minutes. The four portraits (Sees, Runs, Stays, Shapes) build in emotional weight, so resist the urge to rush the later points. The Father Who Runs (Point 2) and the Father Who Stays (Point 3) carry the most pastoral weight for those with father wounds. Give them room. The conclusion should feel unhurried.

Tone & Audience

This message speaks to everyone in the room, not only to fathers. Open by naming the diversity of experience present: those for whom Father's Day is warm, those for whom it is painful, and those still sorting it out. The four portraits of God's fatherhood are designed to meet each of those places. No one should feel left out of this message.

Worship Tie-In Suggestions

- "Good Good Father" — Chris Tomlin
- "No Longer Slaves" — Bethel Music
- "Reckless Love" — Cory Asbury
- "How He Loves" — David Crowder Band

Key Tension to Hold

Points 1 and 2 (The Father Who Sees, The Father Who Runs) carry the most hope for those who have been wounded by absent or harsh fathers. Do not collapse this into sentimentality. Let the weight of God's compassion land before moving on. The Spirit often does His deepest work in the unhurried space after these truths are spoken.

- ① **Small Group Follow Up:** These four portraits translate naturally into a four-question discussion guide for a men's group, couples' small group, or any gathering the week following the message. Each portrait yields one honest, personal question that can carry a group discussion for 15 to 20 minutes.

Four Questions for Continued Conversation

The following questions are drawn directly from the four portraits of God's fatherhood in this message. They are written to be honest without being harsh, pastoral in tone, personal in scope. Use them in a men's group, a couples' small group, or a one-on-one conversation the week following the message. Allow silence. The best discussions often begin after someone is willing to go first.

1

Where do you need the Father Who Stays?

God's love is described as everlasting, from generation to generation. Where in your life have you most feared being abandoned or left behind? How does the permanence of God's love speak to that fear? Who in your life needs you to be the one who stays?

2

Have you let the Father run to you?

The father in the parable ran before the son could finish his speech. Is there something you are still rehearsing, a reason you are not yet worthy, a speech you are still preparing before you will let God fully receive you? What would it look like to simply come home?

3

What does it mean to you that God sees you?

The Father Who Sees knows how you are formed and remembers that you are dust. Where in your life do you most need to be truly known and not judged for it? Is there a place where you have been hiding from God or from others because you fear what being seen might cost you?

4

How is the Father shaping you right now?

Paul prays that we would be rooted and grounded in love and filled with the fullness of God. Where do you sense God at work forming something in you that you did not ask for but may need? What would it look like to cooperate with that shaping rather than resist it?

"I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name." — Ephesians 3:14-15