

# The Father We Never Knew

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[ 0 : 01 ] Please turn again with me to Luke 15 and from verse 11 to 32. Luke 15 from verse 11 to 32, and the Father we never knew.

The Father we never knew. Who is God? Who is God?

I'm not talking in mysterious riddles. Rather, when we think of God, who do we think he is? Judge? King? Father?

I want to suggest this evening that daily experiencing the fatherhood of God is the Christian's highest privilege and that for which God created us and Christ redeemed us.

How much joy we forfeit. How much comfort we deny ourselves when we do not live with God as our father. However, the absence of the daily experience of the fatherhood of God may well be our greatest deficiency as Christians.

[ 1 : 14 ] If we really want to grow in contentment and holiness, joy and assurance, then we need to regain the emphasis Jesus places upon the fatherhood of God.

Now, the most famous description of the fatherhood of God comes from Jesus himself when he tells this parable of the prodigal son.

The American preacher, Tim Keller, has renamed this parable the prodigal God because it describes a God who is really so different from who we conceive him to be.

A God who is preeminently father to his children. Now, Jesus told this parable in a particular context. We have to be careful not to hear what Jesus did not intend to say.

And yet, for all that, it describes who God is as our father. And it describes who we are as his children. Let me say it again.

[ 2 : 17 ] If we really want to grow in contentment, joy and assurance, we need to regain the emphasis Jesus places upon the fatherhood of God.

So, from these verses this evening, we learn three things about God as father. We learn who the God we love, worship, and serve as his children we is.

First, he is the always father. Second, he is the compassionate father. And third, he is the gracious father. The always father, the compassionate father, the gracious father.

The always father, first of all. The always father. Jesus tells a story about a father with two sons. One of them was a teraway. He wanted to live big.

And so he asked his father for his share of the inheritance and he left. He went to a country a long way away and spent all he had on riotous living. The other son remained at home, dutifully working for his father in the fields.

[ 3 : 29 ] One father, two sons. Both of whom were sadly lacking in the faithful child department. One because he forfeited his father's love on the altar of pleasure.

The other because he forfeited his father's love on the altar of duty. The only constant in this story is the father.

The father abused by one son and ignored by the other son. The father who welcomed his teraway son home and invited his legalistic son to experience his love.

The only constant in this parable is the father. Now there are so many simple truths we can learn from this truth that God is our father in this story.

And that by extension he is our father. First of all, God is the father. God is the father.

[ 4 : 38 ] The basic relationship he has with the teraway and the legalist son is that he's their father and they're his sons. As we saw months ago now, I guess, from our studies in Genesis on God's creation of humanity.

This is the basic relationship he has with us all. He is father. All the more so that we believed in Jesus Christ and that relationship has been created and restored through the cross.

He's our father by creation, but even more so by redemption. This is the end point of Christian salvation that we should live with him as our father.

However, the basic relationship he has with us as Christians is that of a father. The basic relationship we have with God is as children.

If we believe that, then we have to ask, do we daily experience the reality of his fatherly love? In that we trust that the things he sends into our lives actually are for our good.

[ 5 : 47 ] Do we believe that as our loving father, he's holding nothing back from us, which is for our good.

That his way is the best way. And that to live in him and for him is what it really means to be human. And to flourish. Be blessed, as Nate famously talks about.

God is the father. In the second instance here, God remains the father. God remains the father. The father in this story of the prodigal son is the father at the beginning of the story, in the middle of the story, in the end of the story.

He's always the father. Think of how his teraway son grievously hurt him. To demand his inheritance is to wish his father dead. For after all, it's only after a parent dies that the child qualifies for his inheritance.

And that child then moves away from home. Far as possible. In order that he may live an immortal life against his father's upbringing of him.

[ 7 : 01 ] And waste his father's inheritance. And yet for all these things, he remains his father's son. There he is. This father's son.

And he's drunk as a lord and he's sleeping with a different woman every night. There he is, this father's son. And he's making a fool of himself with all his friends. And spending his father's money. But for all that, he's got a father at home. He thinks of him and loves him. And then disaster strikes. A famine ravages the land.

And that teraway son, having spent all his money, ends up friendless and alone. He can't get a job doing anything. And finds himself eating the husks even the pigs won't touch. There he is, that precious son of a loving father.

And there he is. He's covered in mud. And all other kinds of muck. And he's competing with pigs for the dirt. How low can you go?

[ 8 : 04 ] But for all that, he's still his father's son. There he is, that father's son with an empty stomach and living with the pigs. He's not making a fool of himself anymore.

He is the fool. But for all that, he's got a father at home who loves him. All the time, there's another son, the older son.

He's out in the fields. Every day, he's working his fingers to the bone. He's plowing and he's planting and he's straining and he's sweating. But all the time, there's this inner resentment.

He resents the generosity the father has shown his brother. He doesn't realize that though his brother may have left with the inheritance, all that the father has also belongs to him.

He's working in the fields for all the wrong reasons and with all the wrong motives. He's doing what he's been told to do. He's doing his duty.

[ 9 : 08 ] He's not motivated by love for his father any more than his terribly brother is. So, the father's got a younger son who wants him dead.

The father's got an older son who thinks of him purely as a master. Neither son loves his father. And yet, for all that, he remains a father to his sons.

He loves them both dearly. And he thinks of them. And they remain his children. Seems almost too simple to say, doesn't it? But the father is always the father.

This is the one constant in this story, as I've said. He is their father. They are his children. They say that you never stop being a parent. It's true. The father in the story of the prodigal son remains a father.

He's the father of a tataway child who wants him dead. He's the father of a dutiful child who doesn't love him, but treats him like a slave treats his master.

[ 10 : 18 ] What we have here is our fickle children, but a faithful father. If we're Christians today, listen up.

God is our father, and we are his children. God will always be our father. In the joys and in the sorrows. In the pleasures and in the pains.

When we know what he's doing in our lives. And when we don't know what he's doing in our lives. When we're near to him. And when we're far from him.

So there's a Christian. She's backslidden. And she's lost a grip of her faith.

And she's out on a Saturday night. And she's getting drunk. With everyone else. And she stopped coming to church. But she's still God's daughter.

[11:15] And he loves her. Well there's another Christian. And he's lost his grip on the grace of Christ. And he's become a legalist. He looks down on everybody else.

Because they're not as culturally pure. As theologically correct. Or as religiously zealous as he is. He's got no joy in faith. And he's a complainer.

But God's still his father. And he's still God's son. See her there.

Late Saturday night. And she's vomiting. What a hangover. Waking up in another man's bed. See him there. And he's slandering other Christians.

And he's criticizing everything and everyone. See him there looking the part in church. But he's got no joy in his life. It's all just duty.

[12:12] See her there. Laughing and looking down on other Christians. Who treat her like a sister. But for all that. God's still her father who loves her. For all that.

God's still his father who loves him. Does it not seem almost too simple to say? God never stops being a father. God never stops being our father.

No matter how far away we go from him. He's still our father. No matter how much we ignore him.

He's still our father. And he loves us. How precious this truth. How revolutionary this truth. Does this not fill us with comfort. With joy and with hope. This is the gospel of God's always fatherhood.

He's the always father. Second. He is the compassionate father. The compassionate father. You know for a man who left nothing.

[13:16] But a tiny drawing in the sand. Jesus literally the legacy. Will last for a thousand years or more. Remember. The way in which he paints this picture of a father. Is so poignantly beautiful.

His tear away son. Comes to his senses. And leaves his pigs behind. And returns home. And in verse 20. We read these words. While he was still a long way off. His father saw him.

And felt compassion. Felt compassion. And ran and embraced him. And kissed him. His father saw. His father felt compassion.

His father ran. His father embraced. His father kissed. It's the compassion of the father. I want to draw your attention to. Because it was his compassion. Which moved him to run to his son.

To embrace his son. To kiss his son. To restore his son. But we think of God. Do we think of his compassion? There's the kind of God we have in heaven.

[14:14] As we sang in Psalm 103. Not distant but close. Not dispassionate but caring. The father. In Jesus' parable of the prodigal son.

Had every reason. Not to have compassion. On his son. After all. His son wanted him dead. He had every right. To execute vengeance. And judgment. Upon his son.

To disown his son. Just as his son. Had disowned him. He had the right to judge. But filled with compassion.

He showed mercy instead. The word Jesus uses here. For compassion. Is deeply descriptive. Powerfully human. In old days.

Rather than being translated. As compassion. It might have been rendered. As bowels of mercies. An old fashioned translation. Bowels of mercies.

[15:13] Because it refers to the seat. Of a person's affections. Greek speaking Hebrews. Saw the inner organs. Of a person. As generating emotions.

Like pity. And love. And tenderness. And kindness. And compassion. We see our children. Suffering. And we talk about it. Having a gut wrenching.

Effect upon us. Our insides. Are turned upside down. We might want to run. To the toilet. We've got constant. Butterflies. But compassion.

Is only. A human emotion. Because first and foremost. It's a divine emotion. Our creator. Our redeemer. Is filled with it. It's a divine virtue.

Pity. Love. Tenderness. Kindness. Mercy. Grace. Who do we imagine. God to be. Stern.

[16:09] Unforgiving. Angry. Judgmental. If we read our Bibles. We'll learn that. Our Father in Heaven. Is compassionate. Toward us. We're straying into.

Very uncomfortable. Theologically. Theological waters. I need to be very precise. In what I say. But that. Gut wrenching. Compassion. We feel. Toward our children. When they're suffering. Is not unique. To us. It's ours. Because it's native. To our Father. The eyes of our Father. Aren't angry. And wrathful. Toward us. Unforgiving. And merciless. Looking for an opportunity. To disown us. As we have disowned him. They are filled. With pity. And kindness. Now. The Father. In Jesus' parable. Knew nothing. Of what his son. Had been up to. In that far off country.

[17:07] He only knew. That his son. Had been lost. But had now returned. But God. Our Father. Knows everything. About what we go through. In life. All the joys.

And the sorrows. All the pleasures. And the pains. He knows. When we're doubting. And he knows. When we're afraid. And he knows. When we're proud. And he knows. When we're selfish. And he knows.

When we've woken up. Beside a man in bed. That we don't. Know. Or when we're vomiting. In the street. Because we're hungover. And as our Father.

In compassion. His compassion. For us. Led him to do. The most extra. Orvery thing. In all of human history. He gave. His one and only son. To the cruelty.

And death. At the cross. For us. Many years ago. When my youngest son. Was very small. Very large now. But very small. We went up. To our family home.

[18:02] In the village of Galsby. In the highlands. It was summertime. So we went to the beach. At that time. There was a couple. Who lived in the village. Called Kenny. And Rita McDonald. Some of you may know Kenny.

Because he was a retired. Free church minister. And every day. Kenny and Rita. Would go into the. Cold waters. To the North Sea. For a refreshing swim. And on that day.

It was a beautiful sunny day. They were swimming as usual. And our youngest son. Decided. That he would like to go. For a swim also. Kenny and Rita. Were a short distance away. And even though.

Kenny's eyesight. Was really very poor. I could tell that. He was watching. My young son. Running yearly. Into the. Into the waves. It really was. A beautifully.

Clear day. And although. I was watching. Our youngest son. Very carefully. And had waded in. Wasn't very far from him. I heard Kenny. Whisper. Loudly. To his wife.

[18:59] Rita. Keep an eye on the boy. Rita. It shouldn't grow. Too deep. Rita. Keep the boy.

Safe. Retired or not. Kenny. Was always. Watching out. For others. He was always. Always compassionate. Always caring. Always willing.

To risk himself. To save others. From disaster. So when I heard him. Say these things. To Rita. I thought of the. Fatherhood of God. How far.

God was willing. To go. To save us. From ourselves. And our sinfulness. He wasn't. Just. Willing. To risk. He did.

Moved. By compassion. He gave his son. To the dirty. Gruesomeness. Of the cross. To save us. Not waiting. For us. To return. From that. Far off country.

[19:53] He came. And found us there. He entered. Deeper. Into the pig pen. Of our dirtiness. And muck. Than we could ever. Have dreamt. Possible. That's how.

Compassionate. He is. So who do we. Imagine our heavenly. Father. To be. Look at the cross. For there. His infinite.

Compassion. Is extended. Toward all of us. In the arms. Of his dying son. And he calls us. To run into that. Loving embrace. He loves us.

More than we can. Ever know. So he's the. Always father. He's the. Compassionate father. And thirdly. And finally. He's the.

Gracious father. The gracious father. I wonder. Whether that. Which most powerfully. Grips us. About the parable. The prodigal son. Is the sheer.

[20:49] Extravagance. Of the father's. Forgiveness. The length. To which. He was willing. To go. To reconcile. Both sons. To his love. So think.

Of that prodigal. Who had wished him dead. Had wasted. His inheritance. In immorality. And ended up. The poorest. Of the poor. See that. Prodigal son. The son.

Of a wealthy father. Bringing disgrace. On the family. By feeding. Dirty pigs. Think of that. Dutiful son. Who resented.

His father. He was working. In the fields. All day. Not because. He loved his father. But out of duty. The dutiful thing.

Had his. Dutiful son. Had his eye. Fixed on only one thing. That after. His father died. He'd get. The whole inheritance. But to both sons.

[ 21 : 47 ] The father. Shows unspeakable grace. To the prodigal. He embraced him. As a son. Not a servant. He clothed him. In regal dress. And through a royal banquet.

There were tears. Of joy. In the eyes. Of both father. And son. To the dutiful son. He explained. Carefully. Why he had shown. Such forgiveness.

And invited him. To share in his joy. For the son. He had lost. But had now found. In both cases.

The father. Showed unspeakable grace.

And showed himself. To be the kind of father. His sons. Never really knew. Because they were too. Wrapped up in themselves. Both sons.

Thought the father. Was hanging back on them. The youngest son. Thought his father. Was holding back. All his pleasures. The oldest son. Thought his father.

[ 22 : 43 ] Was holding back. All his possessions. Fathers are. Families are complicated. Things. And this. Was a complicated family. Every family. In biblical times.

Seemed to be. Very complicated. Here we have a father. Who never. Ever. Gave up. On his children. No matter. How far. They strayed away. From him.

Physically. And emotionally. He embraces. One. And he invites. The other. To share in his joy. What grace.

Such. Powerful. Emotion. In this parable. Who do we. Conceive. God. To be. He is our. Gracious. And loving. Father. First. First. And foremost. As Christians. We forfeit. So much joy. And lose. So much assurance. When we ignore. This primary truth. Of the Christian faith.

[ 23 : 36 ] On the one hand. If we fail. To live. With the daily experience. Of the grace. Of the father. We're tempted. To think. That he's holding. Back on us. The pleasures. And so. We try to find.

These pleasures. He's holding back on us. In the world around us. Like the prodigal. We throw aside. All restraints. We abandon. The pursuit. Of holiness. We give in.

To immorality. And we wish. We'd never heard. The name. Jesus Christ. Or had anything. To do with him. Or on the other hand.

If we fail. To live. With the daily experience. Of the grace. Of our father. We're tempted. To think. He's holding back. On our spiritual. Blessings. And so.

We try to earn. These spiritual. Blessings. Through our obedience. To the law. Like the dutiful son. We become legalists. We abandon.

[ 24 : 29 ] The pursuit. Of gospel holiness. In favor. Of legal conformity. We give in. To the critical. And angry attitudes. Of the dutiful son.

And we don't think. We need God's grace. To grow us Christians. Do we recognize. Ourselves. In either of these. Descriptions. Prodigal son.

The legalist. Both are living. Fatherless lives. With no joy. And no pleasure. Because they don't really know their father. As he really is.

The always father. The compassionate father. The gracious father. So when we see an ultra critical Christian. When we come across an ultra critical Christian.

Who dismisses other Christians. Pure in the basis of what they wear. Their cultural background. Or other minor issues. See in them the older dutiful son. Who does not.

[ 25 : 26 ] Daily experience the grace of the father. And pity them. Or when we see a. Former Christian. Who has turned.

His back. On the faith. Because he. Prefers to dance to this world's tune. And enjoy its pleasures. See in them the prodigal son. Who doesn't experience.

The daily grace. Of the father. And pity him. Picture them both. In your mind's eye. Perhaps you have a picture. Of someone who fits into.

Each of these categories. Picture both in your mind. And then realize. That this person. Who looks back at you. In the mirror. Every morning. Is a strange mixture. Of both dutiful.

And prodigal sons. And that our sinful hearts. Have tendencies. Toward each expression. Whenever.

[ 26 : 24 ] We're tempted. To criticize. Another Christian. We're being the dutiful son. Who's failing to experience. The father's daily grace. Whenever we're tempted.

To abandon the pursuit. Of gospel holiness. We're being the prodigal son. Who isn't daily experiencing. The father's grace. Don't you see then.  
Why. The question. Who is God. Is so really very important. For us. Do we understand. How crucial it is. For us as Christians. To daily experience. God's fatherly love.  
Our father. Is gracious. And loving. Generous. And forgiving. The daily experience. Of the fatherhood of God.  
Is the Christian's. Highest privilege. And that for which. God created us. And Christ redeemed us. How much joy.  
[ 27 : 23 ] We forfeit. How much. Comfort. We deny ourselves. When we do not live with God. As our father. If we really want to live. And grow.  
In contentment. And holiness. Joy. And assurance. Then we need to regain. This radical emphasis. Jesus places. On the fatherhood of God. So.  
So after the service. Let's all go home tonight. And ask ourselves. The question. Whether we've been Christians. For. A year. Or 80 years.  
Or whether we're not yet Christians. Who is. God. To me. Him. Thank you.