

session 8 study guide

a father's love

starter

FATHER FIGURE: Think about your dad for a moment. As you think about him, what specific words, phrases and descriptions come to mind? Take a few minutes to fill in the figure with the words and phrases that best describe your dad.



message

A dad's love comes in all shapes and sizes. Some have a dad who could be the Father of the Year, while others have a dad who isn't around, either physically or emotionally. Perhaps your dad is your hero, your role model and your best friend, or maybe he's your biggest burden and your hardest memory.

No matter what your situation, your dad is important to your spiritual life. Why? The Bible calls God "our heavenly Father." But how we view our heavenly Father is often shaped by our images of our earthly father.

Read the following verses from Proverbs 4:1-9. In this passage, a father passes on advice to his sons. As you read these verses, consider the following questions: (1) What is the key point the father is trying to pass on to his sons? (2) What lessons has your father passed on to you?

Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding.

I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching.

When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother,

he taught me and said, "Lay hold of my words with all your heart;

keep my commands and you will live.

Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them.

Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.

Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you.

She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor."

dig

1. In this passage, what does the father tell his sons to value the most?

2. According to this passage, where did the father say he learned what he is passing down?

3. What does this father say wisdom will do for a person?

4. Do you strive for wisdom and understanding? Do you think they are important? Why or why not?

5. What advice has your father, grandfather or father figure in your life (such as coach, pastor, uncle or family friend) passed on to you?

6. Do you think there is value in getting advice from the generations before you? Why or why not?

7. What things are important to pass down from one generation to the next? Why?

8. Read the following verses. What other characteristics does the Bible attribute to fathers?

Psalms 103:13

Colossians 3:21

1 Thessalonians 2:11-12

Hebrews 12:7-10

apply



My (Jim's) boyhood goal was to play on the La Palma Little League All-Star team. At one point, this dream became a reality. However, what should have been a dream come true became a nightmare.

It all began during the first inning of a game that we were playing against West Anaheim. I was the starting pitcher. I walked the leadoff hitter, the second guy hit a shot to right center field for a double, then I walked the third batter. With the bases loaded, I hung a curve ball and the clean-up hitter cleaned up! He put that curve ball over the fence for a grand slam. Ouch!

I felt humiliated. After only four batters, the coach moved me to shortstop, where I made three errors in the next five innings! I also struck out twice. Needless to say, it wasn't a good day.

When it came to the last inning, however, I had a chance to redeem myself. We were tied up, 6-6, and the bases were loaded as I walked up to bat. Until this day, I had had the best batting average in the league. Despite my earlier strikeouts, everyone seemed confident that I could win the game for La Palma.

I watched the first pitch go right over the plate. Strike one. The second pitch caught the corner. Strike two. I was feeling the tension. I stepped out of the batter's box and looked at my dad. He gave me the thumbs-up sign. The third pitch came straight down the middle of the plate. I watched it go by. Strike three! I was out!

I almost singlehandedly lost the game for us! The other team emerged as the champions.

I had never been more miserable in my life. I cried like a baby. I didn't want to talk to anyone, especially my dad. All my life he'd played catch with me, hit me grounders and threw batting practice. He'd been there to instruct and encourage me. Now I'd let him down. I knew he'd be disappointed. I couldn't face him.

After unenthusiastically congratulating the other team, our coach told us it had been a great year. He said, "We should be proud." Yeah, right!

Finally, I couldn't put it off any longer. I had to face my dad. I slowly gathered my glove, bat and jacket, and then looked up. There he was, running toward me. I knew I'd failed him. I was sure he was going to say something like, "You should never watch three strikes go by when the bases are loaded."

But instead, he rushed over to me, gave me a big bear hug and literally picked me up. Instead of anger, there were tears in his eyes. And he said, "Jimmy, I'm so proud of you."

That night we ate a couple of cheeseburgers and drowned our sorrows in chocolate milk shakes. He told me a story about a time he'd failed miserably in the most important game of the season. We laughed and cried together. My dad never was very mushy, but when I saw the tears in his eyes, I knew he loved me and that everything would be okay.

1. Is there a time when you have had a similar experience with your dad, or another important person in your life?

2. How was the love my dad expressed similar to the kind of love our heavenly Father offers to us?

3. A newspaper columnist once sponsored an “appreciate dad contest” and asked people to write and tell him the qualities of their dads they most appreciated. The following are the top 10 things people said they appreciated most about their dads:

1. He takes time for me.
2. He listens to me.
3. He plays with me.
4. He invites me to go places.
5. He lets me help him.
6. He treats my mother well.
7. He lets me say what I think.
8. He's nice to my friends.
9. He only punishes me when I deserve it.
10. He isn't afraid to admit when he's wrong.

What are three qualities you appreciate in dads? Circle any in the above list or write some new ones here.

4. Obviously, no dad is perfect. The following are eight common gripes about dads:

1. He is too busy.
2. He isn't loving enough.
3. He doesn't listen.
4. He is too irritable.
5. He is often impatient.
6. He is too demanding.
7. He fights too much with Mom.
8. He watches too much TV.

What are three complaints you have about dads? Circle any in the above list or write some new ones here.

5. God calls dads to train up their children, provide for their wives and set an example of godliness to young men in their community, and in an ideal world, our earthly father would mirror our heavenly Father. Why is it difficult for someone who has a poor role model for a father to have a healthy relationship with God as the heavenly Father?

6. What makes a person's relationship with his or her dad so important to that person's concept of God?

7. Why is there no such thing as a perfect dad (see Romans 3:23)?

8. If someone does not have a good relationship with his or her earthly father, how can that person learn to understand and trust the perfect, loving, heavenly Father?

reflect

Jesus revolutionized the concept of God when He referred to God as “My Father” and taught His disciples to address God as *Abba*, the Aramaic children’s word for “father” or “daddy.”

Before Jesus came, most Jewish people were taught not to even take the name of God on their lips. They usually substituted terms such as “the most High,” “from Heaven,” “the Blessed” or “the Power” in place of His name. This made God seem impersonal. When they did refer directly to God or address Him, they called Him “God” or “Lord.” Jesus changed all of this by referring to God as *Abba*. This made the concept of God approachable and comforting. Consider the following example of a dad’s love:

Jim Redmond is the kind of dad who is approachable and comforting.

His son Derek, a 26-year-old Briton, was favored to win the four-hundred-meter race in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Halfway into his semifinal heat, a fiery pain seared through his right leg. He crumpled to the track with a torn hamstring.

As the medical attendants were approaching, Redmond struggled to his feet. “It was animal instinct,” he would later say. He set out hopping, pushing away the coaches in a crazed attempt to finish the race.

When he reached the stretch, a big man pushed through the crowd. He was wearing a T-shirt that read, "Have you hugged your child today?" and a hat that challenged, "Just Do It." The man was Jim Redmond, Derek's father.

"You don't have to do this," he told his weeping son.

"Yes, I do," Derek declared.

"Well, then," said Jim, "we're going to finish this together." And they did. Jim wrapped Derek's arm around his shoulder and helped him hobble to the finish line. Fighting off security men, the son's head sometimes buried in his father's shoulder, they stayed in Derek's lane to the end.

The crowd clapped, then stood, then cheered, and then wept as the father and son finished the race.

What made the father do it? What made him leave the stands to meet his son on the track? Was it the strength of his child? No, it was the pain of his child. His son was hurt and fighting to complete the race. So the father came to help him finish.

God does the same for us. Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But because the power of prayer is in the One who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.

1. As this story illustrates, a father's love is *comforting*. How would you describe Jim Redmond as a dad?

2. What did he do to demonstrate his love for his son?

3. Describe a time when your father (or other father figure in your life) comforted you.

4. Describe a time when your heavenly Father comforted you during a time of need.

5. A father's love is also *sacrificial*. How has your earthly father (or father figure) demonstrated sacrificial love to you?

6. Read Romans 5:8. How has our heavenly Father demonstrated His sacrificial love?

7. A father's love is also *approachable*. Do you feel that your dad (or father figure) is approachable in this same way? What has created this feeling?

8. Read Mark 10:13-16. How did Jesus make Himself approachable to children?

9. Is He approachable to you today? Why or why not?

10. In what ways have you been shown love by your dad (or father figure in your life)?

11. If you could say one thing to that person, what would it be?

12. What would you like to hear that person say to you?

13. What one concept from this Bible study helps you to better understand a father's love?

14. How has this Bible study helped you understand your heavenly Father's love?

meditation



How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!

1 JOHN 3:1