

BFF418 Look to the Father

Scott Moore: Welcome to the "Building Faith Families" podcast with Steve Demme. I'm your host, Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve. How are you today?

Steve: Oh, I'm just, just peary, that's different than peachy.

Scott: As in like a pair?

Steve: I met someone this past weekend that listens to our podcast. He said something about my my dad jokes and peachy comments. I thought I may have to break it up a little bit.

Scott: All right. It's better than being like a kumquat, I guess.

Steve: I was in Texas this past weekend at a homeschool conference. This is my last big one of the year. I did a dad's talk in a big room, and ran out of handouts.

Afterwards, one fellow tried to tell me what the workshop meant to him – but he kept breaking down. His wife was standing next to him, bless her heart, and he said that he didn't have a dad, and didn't know what a dad looks like. That touches me at such a deep level.

I remembered a man in Maine that I met probably 20 years ago at a conference. He was standing there just looking almost desperate holding his five or six-year-old boy's hand and looking at me. He said, "I grew up with my grandmother. I don't know what a father looks like. I want to be a good father to my son."

That's really what prompted this podcast today, Look to the Father. Let's pray first.

Father, thank You for this wonderful relationship that You offered to us, that You'd be our dad, that You'd be our Father. Some of us have had relatively good fathers, and some of us have had horrific childhoods without a father or an abusive father.

But wherever we are today, I pray that we will be helped to see You in a new light. Help us to see our Father. Help us to connect with our Father in heaven, and help us to be, earthly representatives of our heavenly Father. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: In December 2010, Patrick Fagan issued a report called The US Index of Belonging and Rejection. It states that more than half of American children are growing up in fatherless homes. Then, the question is why does this matter?

John Sowers reveals in his book, "Fatherless Generation," that fatherless homes in America account for 63 percent of youth suicides, 71 percent of pregnant teenagers, 70 percent of juveniles in state-operated institutions, 71 percent of all high school dropouts, 85 percent of all youth who exhibit behavior disorders, 85 percent of all youths sitting in prison, and 90 percent of all homeless and runaway children. Those are staggering statistics.

Scott: I was going to say when you said the guy wants to be a dad, I was like, well, just showing up is probably about 50 percent of it. That bit of wanting to be gets you another 10 percent there. You're already on your way to being a good dad just by that much. You know?

Steve: 93 percent of families join a church if the dad or husband is the first to connect with the church. This was published by Word Publishing. I've also seen statistics on abortion and on on poverty that are related to fatherless homes.

You mentioned being present. When our mutual friend, Todd Wilson, came to our Saint Louis gathering where the men meet once a year, beginning in 2009, he asked the question, "What

percentage of you grew up in a home where your dad was present?" Every single person in that room -- and these men all have some form of leadership responsibility. They're leading support groups. They're leading in their church. They're leading in their homeschool community. Every single one of them. Only one guy -- who, by the way, has since been divorced -- his parents, in his opinion, probably should have separated, but they didn't just because they were too stubborn. Being present is huge.

What I've also noticed that, in my own sphere of influence, as I have led retreats for men for years is the impact of dads. When we break up into small groups I often give them a topic. At one event I asked me to tell us about the most influential person in your life. Every man in my small group talked about their dad for good or for ill.

Either they had a faithful, godly father, who encouraged them to be, or they didn't but it was the father that every single man in that group talked about. I don't think you can overemphasize the importance of dads. This is one of the reasons we do what we do.

What do we tell guys when they say, look at me in the eye and say, I want to be a dad. What does a good dad look like? We want to go to Scripture. Ultimately, there's only one perfect father, and that is our heavenly Father.

In Scripture, we want to look at our Father. I could look in Luke 6:36, which I read recently for it says, "Be merciful even as your Father is merciful." Jesus is saying, "I want you to be merciful because your heavenly Father is merciful." That's generally how a man would answer a question of what does a man look like. Let's make a to-do list. Let's make a checklist.

Characteristic #1, God is merciful. However I think in looking at Scripture, we have to first have a healthy relationship with our heavenly Father. We have to experience what it's like to be a son to our heavenly Father because I'm convinced that that is what made Jesus Jesus. We have to experience the love of the Father because Jesus did.

At His baptism, there was a voice from heaven. It was His dad Who said, "This is My Kid. This is My beloved Son." He told him that again in Matthew 17. He said it two more times in Mark. He said it again in Luke.

This is how Jesus began His earthly ministry. This is how He fulfilled the work that God called Him to do. This is how He became a great savior. He first was a beloved Son. I can talk about this, and we could move on, but I want to ask some questions for those who are listening.

How convinced or assured are you that you are a beloved son? In my own experience, for the first couple decades of following Jesus, I would have said, I know that God loves the world, so He must love me, but I didn't have a relationship with Him. I didn't. I was not convinced that I was a beloved son. Since I wasn't assured of His love, it impacted my relationship with my family.

One of the ways is because I felt like I had to perform to receive my Father's "well done." I felt like I had to work to be a beloved son. When I mean work, I mean, I felt like I needed to do lots of Christian activities to try to please my heavenly Father. But because I'd never really felt that I pleased Him, I kept doing more and more, and there was pressure to do more.

I had no margin in my life because I did everything I knew to provide for my family, to be a good husband, to be a good dad. I did everything I could to be a faithful servant in the church. I thought I was seeking first the kingdom, on the surface, but underneath, I see know

that I was trying to get close to my dad. I just wanted my dad to say, "Steve, you are my beloved son. With you, I am well pleased."

I didn't get it until 2012. My breakthrough happened while reading John 59, Jesus is talking to His disciples, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you." That verse reached me, but then I had to spend a lot of time in the next a year and a half searching the Scriptures and transforming my thinking to really get it.

It worked, but it took some time because you can't think a certain way for decades, and then a switch goes off, which is what, sadly, many Christians think. It is not a simple process of "OK, now I got it," and move on. You don't get it overnight. If you do, give a lot of thanks, but most of us have to work at it and be transformed by the Scriptures.

The second thing I had to do is once I was convinced that God loved me, that God had my back, that God liked me, then I had to draw near to Him and come into His presence and wait on Him. I remember, Scott, it was you that asked me, why did it take you so long after you've experienced His love to wait on Him? It took me some convincing. It took time for that experience that I had with God to become a part of my nature.

It is similar to teaching math. I can teach kids, and the light bulb goes on, and they exclaim, "Oh, I get it." But then they've got to do homework for a couple weeks before they really get it and it becomes second nature. They might say, oh, now I see that 9 plus 7 is 16, but then they have got to practice it until they have it.

The two things that I'm saying more and more is we have to transform our thinking. We have to search the Scriptures. We have to abide in His word, but we also have to experience His goodness. I have tasted God's goodness. I have tasted God's kindness. I had come into His presence, and that's what sealed the deal.

Now, what else do you do, though? I'm convinced that we need to ask God to search our hearts. We have to do what Psalm 139 says, "Search me, oh God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there's any way of pain in me."

We need to examine our relationship with our earthly father. Many will start throwing Philippians at me and say, "Oh, no, we need to put our past behind us. We need to move on. One thing I do, I forget what's behind me." No. That's a whole different topic. What we need to do is ask God to search our hearts because we have baggage. We have father wounds.

I discovered my own issues going through therapy, doing the work. I found out that my dad was a traveling salesman for the first five years of my life, formative years. One of the assignments, I forget where I even had to do this for a book I was reading or going through therapy. I was asked to write down what God looked like to me. I wrote, "He's there for me in a pinch."

That's because there's times when I'd been weeping on my knees in my bed, and God had met me. I knew God was there, but it seemed like He was only there when I really needed Him. He's there for me in a pinch. I added, everybody seems to like Him. I believe He loves me, but I don't think He likes me, and I really don't know Him.

When I wrote that out, I looked at it, and I went, that's how I look at my earthly father. He's a nice guy. He didn't know that he was wounding me by being a traveling salesman. He was providing for me.

I want to have a spirit of honor when I look at my dad, and I have been able to do that. I honor him. I've written pages of things that I appreciate about him and honor him, but at the same time, I had some father issues. I felt like he liked my brothers better than me. It's interesting. I talked to my brother, and he thought the opposite.

I thought that he was a great guy. He was there for me in a pinch, and he was. He paid for my tuition. He helped me buy my first house, all these things. He was there for me in a pinch, but I never really knew him. I didn't feel like he liked me. I mean, just enjoyed me. I felt like he was there for me, and he would probably say he liked me, but I'm just telling you what I felt like.

So, this was my father wound. He wasn't abusive. He didn't beat up my mom. He didn't come home drunk, and I had to protect him from my siblings. By the way, I know people that have grown up in homes like that. I didn't experience that, and I'm grateful for this.

However there were still issues that I had to work through because now I've had to re-see God, you might say. I had to rebuild my understanding of God according to Scripture. God never leaves me nor forsakes me. God is a very present help in time of trouble. God is love. He doesn't change. He's not loving, He is love.

I can go on and on because I have made pages of Scriptures to rebuild my understanding of Who my heavenly Father is and how much He likes me and loves me because of what Jesus has done for me. It's transformed my relationship with God and subsequently, it's transformed my relationship with my wife and my kids.

That's the thing that I'm trying to minister to people, and I do want to pursue this next time. I want to talk about what does the Scripture say? What does God look like? But at the same time, I'm not a counselor, and I don't know what to tell people except ask God to search your heart, search the Scriptures yourself. If you ask God to reveal your stuff, ask God to reveal your baggage.

Write down what your heavenly Father looks like, and write down what your earthly father looks like. I think you'll be surprised how similar they are because we often see our heavenly Father through the eyes of our earthly father. If you didn't even have a dad, you're starting from square one, but we need to allow God to redeem that because God will make up the difference. He will.

God wants us to know Him as our good, loving, merciful, ever-near dad that doesn't change. I also have a great advantage as I grew up in a culture with "Leave It to Beaver." Ward Cleaver was a great dad. Did you know that he studied for the ministry? He went to seminary and it shows. He was, in my estimation, one of the greatest dads on television. There is another show which I didn't watch much. It was called "Father Knows Best."

Again, really nice dad. These were guys that I looked up to. These guys gave me images of what a good earthly father was. Growing up with these images helped me. It helped me to see what a dad could be. What do you think there, brother?

Scott: Well, we could go on for multiple episodes on this one for sure.

Steve: Yep.

Scott: I think this relationship is so important that Satan is all over it. That's why you see so many messed up father relationships with their children. If you had a halfway decent dad, cut

him a lot of slack because Satan probably made it look worse than it was. Made him look worse than he was.

Those father wounds are huge digging in the dirt of your past to figure out what happened and ask God to heal you. Not everything is going to be something you need to go confront your dad on, and say, dad, you wounded me. It's probably, I mean, there are probably some things where you might have to do that, depending on what your relationship was, but not everything needs to be, and not everything can be.

One of the things that I love, well, like before, when I said, just showing up and just wanting to be a good dad, those are two big steps in the right direction. Then getting a hold on the whole temper issue, because a lot of dads just naturally ruin the relationship by just having a volatile temper, and they just don't know how to control that.

It's not that you're going to be perfect at it or whatever, but, like, man, you can do so much damage in a moment, and lots of dads have. I think it's really helpful to like your children. That was one thing that Todd Wilson always says, like, do you smile at your kids? I mean, they know that you love them. Do you do they know that you like them? Because they know if you don't like them.

If you never smile at your kid, they think that you don't like them. Do you light up when they come in the room? You know what I mean? Those are not, it's not like most dads would say, "Oh, I like my kids." But you ask them, "Do you light up when they come around?" or, "Do you always have something critical to say?" It's like, dang, man. And I'm as guilty as anybody of that.

I'm always griping about something that somebody didn't do right. It's like, man, I need to let them know I like them. I remember hearing a pastor say one time, I think a lot of people have this idea like, "I did as a kid," he was saying, "I did it as a kid. I felt like, I know Jesus loves me and the psalm says it. Then you know, everybody repeats it to me. But I feel like his dad is really ticked off." I'm just like, wow.

I think a lot of us have that image of God the Father that, like, yeah, Jesus loves me. This I know. But his dad is really ticked.

Steve: If I can go a little deeper, you can't like your kids until you're liked. You can't smile at your kids until you know that God's smiling at you. That's my conviction that you can do certain things, but it's not the same unless it flows from your experience with your heavenly Father.

This is the gift God the Father gave to His Son. He told him, "I'm so glad You're my son. I love You to pieces. Every time I see You, You make me smile. I want to pass it on to my kids." But what I found was it was really hard to pass it on until I'd received it. I don't think you can give something long term.

Now, you can give it short term. You can make some little tweaks. But your kids live with you, and they know, well, maybe dad just listened to a podcast. But if you really let God work deep in your heart, it's going to flow from you differently once you have it blown it flowing to you. We're conduits.

I'll just give another example. I was speaking in Minnesota years ago. Minnesota used to require you that when you spoke, you spoke for an hour and then had 15 minutes for Q&A. You had to stop after 60 minutes. So we stopped.

I had talked about how my wife had brought up the fact that I had a problem with anger. I confronted it. I had gone to my elders for prayer. I'd read books. In other words, I did everything I knew to do to talk about, to ask God to work in my heart. Finally, I just broke down before God one day in my room and I prayed and I said, "You have to change something in my heart, and He did."

I was sharing that with the men and how I'd gone to my sons and asked their forgiveness for my anger problem. Then one man from the audience said, did your dad have a bad temper? I said, I can only remember about five times when he lost his temper, but I remember all five of them.

We men were all there in that room trying to be cycle breakers because most of us inherited a temper because we had a dad with a temper. That was part of our growing up, but now we have to ask God to examine those experiences and then we have to be transformed and experience God Who is full of mercy and lovingkindness. He's slow to anger.

These are the kind of things that we have to bathe ourselves in. We have to first examine the Scripture, and then we have to experience God's grace that He doesn't get mad like we do or like our dad or like our grandfather did or, most of these things go back generations. It takes some work to break these cycles.

Scott: I think that's really, really important to get what you're saying here, because it's not just being in the Scripture. There are a lot of pastors who, you know, there's a reason they have the cliché of the preacher's kid that's a hellion, hell raiser or whatever.

The relationships are all messed up. You see families where the dad was a pastor or a missionary or whatever, and the kids don't even follow God. I think it's possible to look at the Scriptures a lot and not get this. You do have to come to the point where you get the relationship.

Steve: It's not fun to take deep breaths and look at your past. One of the books that helped me to do that, and which I read it at least three times was "Emotionally Healthy Spirituality," because you can be spiritual and emotionally unhealthy. We have to do some work.

When I was doing the work in there, one of the assignments was, what did your grandparents look like? I realized that my grandfather, my dad's dad, was not a kind man. He was actually mean. I didn't see it. I'm the grandchild. But what I heard from my mom and what I later understood is that my father grew up with a mean dad.

The fact that he was mostly gentle and kind with me. Maybe he did lose it four or five times, but man, that's a lot better than what his dad did with him. So, doing the work in a spirit of honoring your father but understanding your father and where he was from, helps.

Steve: I'm sharing from my experience, but it's a gutsy prayer to say, "Search me, oh, God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there be any way of pain and leave me in a way everlasting."

Our next big resource, we could have a whole episode on this one, is the people that are going to help us the most, are our own wife and kids, because they see us and they

experience us. Even when we think we're doing pretty well, no, it was my wife that had to come to me and point out these things to me. The more rooted and grounded I am in God's love, and the safer I am, the more my wife is going to tell me stuff. OK, that's a whole other episode.

Let's pray. Father, thank You that you do love us to pieces, and You do light up when You see us because Jesus has taken away our sins. Jesus has clothed us in his righteousness. Jesus has adopted us into the family of God. And because of that, now You look at us just like You looked at Your Son. And as You loved Your Son, so does Your Son love us. We got it.

We want to get it and we want to get it deeper. I pray for every man listening that You'll give them a sense of hope. "I can do this." That You'll reveal to them a strategy, perhaps some of the things we've shared or perhaps some things that they find in their own sphere. I pray that You will restore biblical dad-hood and biblical husbanding, which that You help us to love our wives and our kids just like You loved us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scott: Amen. That's our show for this week, folks. Thanks for joining us for the Building Faith Families podcast with Steve Demme. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at [spdemme@gmail.com](mailto:spdemme@gmail.com). If you have a question for me, you can reach me at [scott@unsocializedmedia.com](mailto:scott@unsocializedmedia.com). Thanks for joining us. Have a great week.