

He Shall Be Called: Everlasting Father, Isaiah 9:6, 12/15/19

When you are trying to pick out baby names there are these rules that you really don't think much about before having kids. If you or your spouse ever dated anyone, that name is off limits from now until the end of time. Don't even suggest it for your pet hamster. Off limits is anyone from your childhood you didn't like, someone who picked on you or that friend who went behind your back or the bully who stole your lunch money. Co-workers names, My wife was a teacher when we were having our kids, so a bunch of those names were off limits...especially Steven. And then if anyone in your extended family has claimed a letter of the alphabet...J- all those are off limits...my father Jacob, Joelle, Joseph

Here in Isaiah 9:6 we are talking about much more than finding an available baby name. The prophet Isaiah tells us that the Messiah would not only have a name, but 4...and these names are not really names like John and Susie, they are royal titles. These titles describe aspects of the very character and work of the Savior, Jesus. He shall be called the **wonderful counselor**, matchless in his wisdom, who understands everything we are going through. He shall be called the **Mighty God**, El Gabhor, who is matchless in his power toward us, in us and through us. And today, we see that he shall be called **Everlasting Father**.

Now the first thing we clear up is that our instinct is not to associate Jesus with the term Father. From the view of the Trinity, Jesus' title is not the Father, but the Son. The Son is not the Father, neither is the Father the Son; and although they are one God, essentially and eternally. Isaiah 9:6 has no bearing upon the position and titles of the three Persons of the Trinity with regard to each other; it does not indicate the relation of Deity to itself, but the relation of Jesus Christ to us. He is forever father-like in his character and action toward his spiritual children.

Some of you HAVE great dads or you HAD a great dad and your memories of him are cherished. Some of us, that's not our story. And for some of you the greatest pain in your life has come from your relationship with your father for a variety of reasons. The thought of Jesus as an everlasting father may be difficult for you to grapple.

There is an article on Gospel Coalition written by a young man with that very struggle. *"I was 25 years old before I could say the word 'father' while praying, because of the kind of relationship—or lack thereof—that I had with my dad. It didn't roll off my tongue the way it did for many of my Christian friends. How could I come to God without fear when I had been scared to go home whenever Dad was there? How could I understand God's love and faithfulness when Dad left town because he loved something, or someone, more than me? How can God be a mighty fortress of protection when Dad hit instead of hugged?"*

Some of us can relate to that struggle. Whether the term father conjures up positive or negative emotions and images for you, today my prayer is that you would encounter a father in Jesus that speaks to your deepest longings. A father you can trust to keep his promises. Today I want to look at **3 Promises of Jesus as our everlasting father**.

Promise #1 To love and accept us unconditionally.

Some of us have dads like this, that no matter how much we've messed up they have always loved us and encourage us. My dad- broke his van door, or blew up the sewage line during choir practice. They were not stingy with their words and never ceased to tell you what you mean to them. But some of us have had dads that only gave you love when you achieved their standards. Maybe no matter what you did, it never seemed to be enough. If you got A's in most subjects, they were focused and upset at the B, if you scored a goal, they were quick to point out why you let that defender steal the ball, at the recital they were quick to point out the note you missed. You rarely or never heard the words, "I'm so proud of you." And "I love you." Some people go through much of their adult life with this open wound. Some are still looking for those words to fill the hole. This father wound can drive their careers, ambitions, how they relate those close to them. And, understandably, they carry this perspective of themselves into their relationship with God. Whatever you do, you have this nagging, unspoken doubt, "*Have I done enough?*" You constantly compare yourself to others and say, "If I were like him or her, then maybe God would accept with me." But this is not the Jesus we encounter in Scripture.

John 13:1b Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

These words are written right after three years with his disciples. People who routinely messed up, doubted...these were not the A students, football stars and first chairs. They received the 1s and 2s on the report cards- Not meeting expectations. But even worse, they were about to abandon Jesus, one deny even knowing him 3x, and one betray him. Jesus knew all of that and he still loved them to the end. And his love was not only with words, but actions. He washed their feet. An intimate act of devotion and service. This is how Jesus feels about you. Not because you have met the standards and expectations. But just because you're his!

Romans 8:38-39

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Are you convinced? Have you taken that into your heart? Would you be able to write that? Some of us are trapped in the lie of Satan that says, "this is true for others but not me." Certainly, that couldn't include me. I'm too much of a screw up. Yeah, so am I...join the club of sinners, population everyone. The enemy is half right. We are screw ups. We have broken God's law and deserve judgment. But the enemy's whisper doesn't include the second part of the truth.

Tim Keller "**The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.**"

Because Jesus loved you so much that he stood in the way of judgment and took it for us on that cross. He who knew no sin...

Because he is a loving father...

Promise #2 To discipline for our ultimate good.

We all instinctively know that properly applied discipline is critical to raising well-adjusted children. My parents utilized a wide variety of discipline methods for my brothers and I growing up. One method for particularly willful disobedience was the paddle, many can relate, including my own children. A funny aside, one time my brother, knowing a spanking was coming, managed to tape coasters to the inside of his underwear. I'm lighthearted and speak fondly of those days because the paddles, while in the moment were not enjoyable, I know they were applied by loving parents who cared enough to train me.

But not all of us have had fathers who disciplined us properly and that brings back painful memories. Maybe you had a ticking time bomb of a dad. This is the kind of dad where you just never knew quite what to expect from him. If he had had a bad day at work, the smallest thing would set him off. Maybe you felt like you're constantly on eggshells around him and if he doesn't get what he wants, whether it's immediate obedience or dinner on the table or whatever, he might fly off the handle. And maybe alcohol or drugs magnified these outbursts. But more than once you got hurt... verbally, emotionally, or physically. And let me say here publicly, there is never an excuse for abusive discipline done with excessive force. And if you have an anger problem, spanking should not be a tool in your discipline toolbelt. Parents, never spank out of anger. If you are in an abusive home, whether you are listening as a child or a parent or a concerned loved one, speak up and say something. To a pastor, a teacher, a friend, your other parent or grandparent...because it's not OK.

And of course, if this was your experience, it affects how you see your Heavenly Father. You have a hard time trusting him, or leaving things in his hand. You walk on eggshells and so maybe you try to appease him or avoid him. How can you trust that he'll really take care of you? What if he happens to be in a bad mood? And, just as with your earthly dad, you are always trying to figure out what to do to contain him, to stay on his good side. When something goes wrong in your life, you wonder, "What did I do now?"

This is not the character of Jesus. **Psalm 103:8. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.** Jesus doesn't fly off the handle. He isn't capricious, he isn't cruel. He is steady and always stands ready to give us grace at first sign of repentance. But because he is a good father, he does discipline, in love, for our good.

Hebrews 12:5-6, 8-11

⁵ *And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you"*

⁶ *because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.*

⁸ *If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.*

⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.

¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Discipline is a sign we are his children. And because he is a loving father who wants to see our ultimate good, he disciplines. He will allow us to feel the pain of our sinful choices. That may be through withholding blessing, it could be through taking something away from you that is an idol, it could be through a sense of distance, it could be allowing the natural sowing and reaping principles to come into effect in your life. This is not because He hates you. He is in more pain over it than you are. But he is willing so that ultimately good would come out of it, training for righteousness and peace. When our boys were younger and we had to spank them or discipline, right after discipline, we always reaffirmed our love for them and those were some of the most tender and affectionate moments. Friends, God may bring discipline, are you running toward his arms or away from Him?

Promise #3 To hold you fast forever.

He's not an absentee dad, he won't run out, he's present forever. Some of us had dads that were at every game, every recital, home for dinner most nights and even now you know is always there for you. But that's not the case for many. 40% of American homes are fatherless homes. Far more have absentee dads.

Bo Jackson, who some argue was the greatest athlete ever to live—professional in both football and baseball: *"My father has never seen me play a football or baseball game. Can you imagine? Here I am, Bo Jackson, one of the so-called premier athletes in the country, and I'm sitting in the locker room and envying every one of my teammates whose dad would come in and talk, have a drink with them after the game. I never experienced that."*

And here's what happens: Kids often interpret the absence of their dad as a personal rejection. They think they weren't important enough; good enough. Counselors say this often manifests itself in a background sadness like a soundtrack that they live with that they don't quite understand; a fear of being alone, or a nagging suspicion in their lives that any good thing in life is going to eventually go away.

And this can carry into their understanding of Jesus. You fear He might leave you, he might change his mind about you, he might find something better. But nothing could be farther from the truth. You know the number one promise that is repeated more than any other in Scripture? **I am with you, I will never leave you or abandon you.**

Listen to what Jesus said to all those who belong to him.

John 10:28 *I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.*

And here's another reality: Even the best dads die. They won't be around forever, and when they die, they can leave this big gaping hole in your heart you don't know how to fill. That's why I love that word that Isaiah adds, "Everlasting." Jesus is the Everlasting Father.

Do you know the last image of the Bible? Revelation 22- Immanuel. God with us forever. He never disappoints; never forsakes; never leaves; never dies. He's the Father your heart has always craved. He's the Father you've been searching for, and when you realize that, you can heal from the wounds and disappointments left by your earthly father, and in many cases, even learn to forgive and love him again.

Remember that young man from the article that struggled to pray to God as a father? The more he saw Jesus in Scripture, the more it began to change his view. He began to realize: *that God was the real Father; his dad was only the replica. An earthly dad is supposed to be like training wheels teaching you about the Heavenly Father. And I had some really bad training wheels, they were terrible, but now I know the real Father, and that was the point the whole time, which gives me the ability to cope with all the ways my earthly father failed me.* **So, reverse the order. Stop viewing your heavenly father through the lens of your earthly father, evaluate your earthly father in view of your heavenly one.**

Summary: Does your heart long to be someone special to someone else? To matter? For someone to be thinking about you and to say the words, "I love you and I'm proud of you?" Do you want to be able to trust a father's correction who has your best interest in mind? Do you desire the experience of an unfading love? His name is Jesus.

The ultimate proof that he can fulfill these promises is the cross and resurrection. He demonstrates his love by dying for us in our place like the ultimate sacrificial father. But he fulfills his promise to be a father to us forever in his resurrection.

How do you receive the promises of the Everlasting Father? By becoming one of his children.

John 1:12-13

¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.