

I grew up watching T.V. sitcoms—shows like *Happy Days*, *Family Ties*, *Silver Spoons*, *Different Strokes*, and *Growing Pains*. All of these sitcoms shared similar family values, and each sitcom showcased a father who was wise, strong, present, and loving.

But things began to shift in the 90's; most sitcoms stopped portraying the idealized family. In the 90's shows like *Married with Children*, *The Simpsons*, *Seinfeld*, and *Everyone Loves Raymond* took their place. Among other things, each of these shows portrayed fathers as loveable, bumbling, idiots—— incorrigible, incompetent, and incapable of entering into healthy, loving relationships.

When you hear the word “father,” what descriptors come to mind? My father was, and is, strong, present, and loving. I didn't always agree with my father, we didn't always get along; he wasn't perfect by any means, but I always knew he was for me, and, that he loved me.

I have friends who have a very different experiences of their father. A few of my friends grew up with an angry, alcoholic father—life was volatile, the family was always on edge, tip-toeing around the house, trying to avoid an explosion. Some of my friends experienced physical violence in their homes, many more experienced empty promises, emotional distance, and verbal abuse.

One of my friends loves to tell the story of how things changed when he finally experienced God as His Father. For the first time in his life, he found a love that would meet him where he was, mess and all. For the first time in his life, he found mercy and forgiveness. For the first time in his life, he experienced a Father who didn't use his strength to control, who wouldn't tear him down, who would love him no

matter how poorly he performed. *Doesn't everyone need a Father like this?*

Last week we read Isaiah's prophecy, taken from chapter 9, verses 6 and 7; Isaiah spoke these words to a people who had forgotten God and gone their own way. I said last week that the core sin of humanity is independence—*I don't need God, He's in my way, I can manage on my own*. This core sin (independence) has become the bedrock of Western society.

I said last week that every movement away from God, towards independence, begins with believing a lie. The great lie—as old as Eden itself— is that *God is not sufficient for your needs to be met or for your longings to be fulfilled*. Over the past few weeks, we have been addressing variations of this lie—that we cannot trust God with our lives because: **(1) He is not wise enough; (2) He is not strong enough; (3) He is not loving enough; and (4) He cannot restore what's been broken.**

In Isaiah 9, God speaks a word of promise—a child will be born, a Son given, and this Son will be living proof that God can be trusted. Let's turn once again to Isaiah and read about this promised Son.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.”

This morning, I will be keying in on the third title taken from Is. 9:6, **Everlasting Father**, and look at how this is fulfilled in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And as I do, let me begin by addressing the apparent contradiction—if Jesus is the Son of God, why does Isaiah refer to Him as the “Everlasting Father”? *What does this phrase mean, and how can it be applied to Jesus?*

Is Jesus the Son, or the Father? The term "everlasting Father," can be translated more directly as the "father of eternity"—this title speaks to the eternal nature of God; God is without beginning or end. And by applying this title to the coming Messiah, Isaiah lets us know that the Son to be born is also from eternity, without beginning or end—self-existing and ever-living. He will be like no one the world has ever seen.

The opening to John’s Gospel repeats this same truth. While Jesus was born at specific time in human history, God the Son has always existed. John 1:1-2 says, *“In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God.”*¹ Isaiah is making the claim that the One to be born will share in the eternal nature of God. But more, the One to be born will reveal the nature and character of the God we address as Father.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Listen to these words, taken from Hebrews 1:1-3: *“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets...but in these last days he has spoken to us by*

his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”

In every word Jesus spoke, in every action, the Father was on display—this is the miracle of the Incarnation—God the Son took on our humanity so that we would have a flesh and blood example of God among us. In John 14:9, Jesus spoke to His disciples saying, *“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”* The Creator became one of the created. One who was infinite became finite. The One who was perfect entered into our mess—He is God with us, God for us, the God who loves us.

illus: The last few Fridays, because of a sore lower back, I have been going in for massage appointments. I had never previously been to the clinic I visited, and I was assigned to a therapist I had never met before. Dinyar is a delightful person—friendly, engaging, and skilled at his craft. As he began his assessment, he asked what I did for work. When I told him that I was a pastor, he remarked, *“I knew it...I knew there was a special energy about you!”* That clued me in to the fact that Dinyar was a “spiritual” person.

Dinyar was born and raised in India, among a family that respected religion—Hinduism and Zoroastrianism were a part of his early upbringing, and he was later educated in a Catholic school. We’ve been talking about spirituality the last few appointments and just this past Friday, he asked if I had a favourite story about Jesus. What an opportunity! I wasn’t expecting the question—and I have so many favourites—but the moment he asked, the Holy Spirit brought a story

¹ New Living Translation.

to mind; instead of sharing a story about Jesus, I shared with Dinyar a story Jesus told.

Jesus is a master storyteller—He never wasted a word. His stories have layers, they have a purpose, they reveal something about us, about God, about life. I trust that the story I shared with Dinyar will speak to you this morning. After I tell this story, I want to show you how Jesus entered into our story, representing the Father, so that we can experience the fullness of the Father’s love for us.

Now for the story...I said to my new friend, “Dinyar, I want to tell you a story about a Father who loved His two sons.” One day the younger son came to the father and asked to be given his inheritance early. “Father, give me the share of the property that will one day belong to me.’ So the father divided his property between his two sons.²

I explained to Dinyar that in the Ancient Near East a son would never ask for his inheritance early; this request would have been heard in that culture as, “*I wish you were dead*”. Culturally, the father should have refused and punished the son. Instead, the father grants the son’s request. This is true act of love—the Father gives freely, knowing that in doing so, he is opening himself to rejection.

The younger son takes his inheritance, but remember, it came in the form of property. In order to convert the property into cash, the younger son would have needed to find a buyer from the village. Liquidating this land would have been a public event, heaping further

shame and disgrace on everyone in the family—no wonder the son leaves quickly.

The younger son travelled to a far off country and squandered his inheritance on wild living. As long as the money was flowing, he had more friends than he knew what to do with, but when the money ran out, he couldn’t find anyone to let him crash on their couch. The only job he could find was feeding pigs, and it wasn’t long before he realized the pigs were eating better than he was.

And that’s when he remembered his father’s generosity—his father’s servants ate much better than these pigs. He decided to go back, but how could he return? He had insulted his father, shaming him before the entire village. He couldn’t take back what he had said and done, but his life with the pigs was a dead end—it was time to return.

As he began his return, the younger son began to rehearse his speech. “*Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.*” His self-evaluation was a culturally true statement—he had disowned His father and wasn’t worthy to be called a son. And so he planned to return to his village, but not his home.

As he approached the village, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him repeatedly. Then the son said to him, ‘*Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.*’ **But the father didn’t seem to be listening;** he said to his servants, ‘*Quickly, bring out a robe—my best one—and put it on him; put my*

² The story can be found in Luke 15:12-32.

ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Kill the fattened calf, and invite the whole village—we're celebrating tonight because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

The younger son returned home in disgrace, and word would have reached the village before he actually showed up. A crowd would have gathered, serving as a gauntlet for the son to endure before he ever reached his father. Perhaps this is why the father is waiting and watching for his return—perhaps this is why the father runs to embrace him; it was an act of protection. The father's public demonstration of forgiveness and mercy means that the son can enter the village—if the father has received him as a son, then he is a son indeed. *Don't we all need a Father like this?*

But I've only told half of the story, remember, this is a story about a father who loved his two sons. The elder son was working in the field, but as he approached the house he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. The servant replied, *"Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, we're celebrating his return!"* At the mention of his younger brother, the elder brother's heart filled with hatred and anger; he refused to go in. And so, once more, we see the father running to embrace one of his sons. The father came out and began to plead with him.

The elder son couldn't believe his low-life brother was being given another chance. In his own thinking, the party should be thrown in his honour—he's the one who stayed, he was the responsible one, he had earned this honour. By refusing to go in, the elder brother insults his father—culturally, his refusal is a public sign of disagreement and

contempt. But once again, the father loves freely, knowing that in doing so, he is opening himself to further rejection.

He pleaded with his son, saying, *"Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."*

This is how the story ends—the father pleading, the elder son refusing, and a party going on that cannot be enjoyed by the father or his two sons.

Why did Jesus tell this story? Luke 15:1-2 offers the following insight: Jesus told this story to set people straight on how the Father relates to those who have gone their own way—He waits for them. He pleads with them. He loves them.

The great lie is that *God is not sufficient for our needs to be met or for our longings to be fulfilled*. The younger son believed the lie that in order to find true life and love, he had to reject his father and leave home. But the further he got from the father, the more his soul ached to return—when his bank account bled dry and his stomach growled with pain, he came to his senses and realized that he had left the only place he would ever be whole.

Henri Nouwen writes, "Leaving home...is a denial of the spiritual reality that I belong to God with every part of my being, that God holds me safe in an eternal embrace".

Each of us is the younger son...each of us have wandered from God, thinking that independence will lead to life. It's doesn't. It never will.

There is no life apart from the One who gives it. And so **Jesus became the younger son...**he left His Father's house—He left Heaven's splendour—and He struck out for the far country, looking for lost, broken, rebellious sons and daughters, who needed a way to return home.

Do you need to return to the Father this morning? Have you strayed far from your heart's true home?

Jesus, like the Father, is rich in mercy and generous in love. In John 15:13, Jesus said, *“There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.”*³ In 1 John 3:16, we read, *“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.”*

This morning the Father waits for you—Jesus has provided the way for your return. Like the father in the parable, Jesus ran to embrace us, enduring the cross and scorning its shame. When Jesus died on the cross, He did so carrying the weight of our sin, our shame, our rebellion against the Father. And like the younger son in the parable, you don't need to clean yourself up in order to turn to the Father—He will fit you with a new wardrobe the moment you return. The Father is waiting, watching for your return; He longs to embrace you.

But there is more than one lost son in Jesus' story—the elder son was lost too, but when and where he lost his way is more difficult to define. Though outwardly diligent and dutiful, the elder son was far from being at home with the father.

The elder brother had believed the same lie as his younger brother, but he acted out in the opposite direction. Instead of heading out on his own to find true life and love, he determined to make something of himself and prove to his father that he was worthy of his love. He dedicated himself to saying and doing all the right things hoping to earn, or win, a love he thought was elusive.

The younger brother left, and he remained, but he found himself in a distant country of his own making. He defined the father—son relationship in terms of withdrawals and deposits. Sadly, many of us make same mistake in relating to God.

Voices all around us tell us that we had better make something of ourselves, that our performance is what guarantees the love of others. These voices are so dangerous because they do describe “the way things are” in many of our relationships. But these voices drown out the true voice of the Father—they make us wonder if He's just like everyone else.

If you find yourself anxious to please God, or worried that He's disappointed in you—you might be an elder daughter or son. If you find yourself bitter towards others who aren't nearly as righteous as you are but seem to experience God's love more freely than you ever have—you might be an elder son or daughter.

The elder son's way of life is on display in his bitter tirade, *“Father, all these years I've slaved for you...I've done all I could to make you proud, to earn your love”*.

³ New Living Translation.

Each of us is the older brother and Jesus became the older brother too—Jesus showed us how to be at home with the Father, both delighting in, and knowing the delight of the Father’s love.

This morning the Father waits for you, He pleads with you. *“Come and experience the fullness of my love. Do you really think that my love for you comes down to what you’ve done for me? Why try to earn something that I freely give to you? You are my daughter, my son, and nothing can change that.”*

Conclusion: Jesus said, *“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”* When we look upon Jesus, we see the face of God.

This morning, some of us may need to shed the lies that have plagued us. Perhaps you have believed the lie that God could not love you—that you are too far gone, that you have journeyed beyond the reach of His love. Perhaps you have believed the lie that in order to get in on what God offers, you will need to clean yourself up first, that His love must be earned. I want you to hear the truth this morning, **God the Father loves you—He always has.** This is why Jesus came, to remind us of this very truth.

All of need a Father like this—one who is loving, trustworthy, and strong. Set your feet towards Him today—He is waiting, He is watching for your return.

As I conclude this morning, I’ve asked Alana to sing a song of response for us. As she sings, I want to ask you to think about your relationship to the Father—*where do you need His love to meet you today? Do you need to be rescued? Do you need to be released from*

performance? Do you need to be reminded that He is with you and for you?

As Alana sings, make this song your own prayer to the Father, ask Him to meet you where you are.

Song of Response: *I Am Not Alone* by Kari Jobe

When I walk through deep waters
I know that You will be with me
When I'm standing in the fire
I will not be overcome
Through the valley of the shadow
I will not fear

I am not alone
I am not alone
You will go before me
You will never leave me

In the midst of deep sorrow
I see Your light is breaking through
The dark of night will not overtake me
I am pressing into You
Lord, You fight my every battle
And I will not fear

You amaze me
Redeem me

You call me as Your own

You're my strength

You're my defender

You're my refuge in the storm

Through these trials

You've always been faithful

You bring healing to my soul

Pray