

## A Father to the Fatherless

I was just nine years old. I knew almost nothing about cancer. I didn't know anyone who had cancer. It was only something I heard about when adults talked to each other, or I would catch glimpses of a public service announcement on television that told about the effects of cancer. Then it happened to my daddy. And just like that "cancer" became a word I despised.

It sounded bad. Really bad. Lung cancer. By that time I had already heard enough to know that smoking is bad for you—how it damages your lungs and how it can even kill you. I was old enough to put two and two together. My dad smoked, and now he had lung cancer. Deep down I think I knew he was nearing the end of his life.

Nine months later cancer claimed my dad's earthly life, but death did not hold him. As Jesus told Martha at the death of her brother Lazarus, **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."** (John 11:25, 26) I wrote these words in the front of my school Bible and looked at them often. I believed the promises of Jesus; I knew my dad believed those words too. He was washed in the waters of baptism and lived his life as a redeemed child of God. Now he lived with Jesus in the glorious realms of heaven.

I heard God's promises in my life daily and believed them, but in the upcoming days and years I would let doubt and anger creep in. My dad's death occurred at a time in my life I really felt I needed him most. I needed my dad's secure arms around me so I could feel his love for me. I needed his loving but firm voice to tell me words like, "I am disappointed in your decision. You used poor judgment and what you did was wrong. Now let's talk about what you can do differently next time." I needed his soft voice to tell me the words I needed to hear, like "I love you; I'm proud of you!"

**A father to the fatherless...is God in his holy dwelling.** (Psalm 68:5)

I felt the need for loving guidance from my father, but God had different plans for my life. Instead, he gave me an earthly father for a short time—a time during which my dad continually pointed me to Jesus and his saving work. Then God placed other Christian family and friends in my life, not to replace my dad, but to continue his legacy of faith. These people were not in my life by chance. God used them to nurture and encourage me in his promises.

**God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."** (Hebrews 13:5)

Did I ever cling to those promises! What else could have pulled me out of the deep, dark places that I allowed very few people to see? My heavenly Father knew how I struggled to cope, and he knew exactly how to rescue me from my heartache and sadness. His Word gave me the comfort and true guidance I needed. No matter how much I thought I needed my earthly father, this need could never compare to my need for my heavenly Father. God led me to see my need for *him*, at that time and in the many years to come.

**The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;  
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.  
He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.**  
(Psalm 18:2)



In the coming years, there would be many times I would feel the need for a father in my life. I missed the special father-daughter relationship I saw so many of my friends experience. At those times I knew I should turn to my perfect heavenly Father, yet I didn't always do this. I would turn to people who seemed to fill the void...until I realized I was idolizing those special people in my life. That's not what God intended either. Thankfully, God used those same people I clung to so desperately to point me back to him.

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.**  
(Proverbs 3:5-6)

God allows us to go through difficult times to draw us closer to him. It might take months; it might take years to work through the pain and loss. Yet he promises to never let us go. No earthly father can ever give the perfect peace, stilling comfort and unending love we receive from our heavenly Father! He is the Father who will give me the gift of heaven—the gift of seeing my dad again! And for that I rejoice!

**Prayer:**

**O Lord, you are my only true Father. In Christ you redeemed me; through Baptism you made me your own dear child. Thank you, Father! In the times when I wander away from you, bring me back to your loving embrace. In the times when I am tempted to turn to loved ones before I turn to you, keep my eyes focused on your promises. Thank you for loving me. I love you, Father! Amen.**

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