

Finding the Perfect Father
(Restoring Father God's Image in a Fatherless Society)

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**A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty
of Vision International University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry**

July 9, 2007

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Abstract

This paper is designed to examine the social and spiritual crisis that exists based on a person's distorted view of God. The lens through which a person primarily views God is their relationship or lack of relationship with their natural father. Not only will this paper explore the community crisis of fatherlessness, but will also look at a biblical basis for a proper understanding of God the Father. The importance of believers renewing their mind with the fact of the Perfect Heavenly Father's unconditional love is an essential element that will also be explored, as a necessary ingredient for societal reformation. The final area that will be looked at is what it looks like when people are walking in the security of the Father's love on a daily basis and generously giving that unconditional love away to the world.

Chapter One: Introduction

Nothing in American Society has been more twisted and damaged than the concept of Father. No one in the history of the world has been more misrepresented than God the Father. He is easy to malign, condemn, and speak against because He does not defend Himself. However, in the damaging of the concept of Father, our whole society is bereft of security, identity, and belonging. It is urgent that we see the Fatherhood of God restored. This is what Jesus came to do.¹

The above declaration becomes the starting point for this author. Whether you are watching the evening news at eleven or reading the local paper while you are shoving down a quick snack it is the exception and not the rule that you are confronted with the fact that we are living in a fatherless society.

To make the allegation that we are living in a fatherless society it is necessary to be aware that some people will be offended. Offended or the obvious, the facts

¹ Mumford, Bob (2002, 2006). Agape Road, Shippensburg: Destiny Image. (pg. 29)

are overwhelming, and it is now not later that something must be done to avoid anymore of the severe damage that has already been caused by the disintegration of dad.

As the facts are laid wide open in the next few pages it is important that the focus not be on the obvious problem, but on the underlying crack in the foundation that leads people to a faulty view of the Heavenly Father.

How a person views the Heavenly Father has a direct affect on their overall relationship with God. If a person's concept of God is damaged and distorted then it is impossible to come to the conclusion that the relationship is unaffected and untainted.

If the above is true then it is equally important to understand where that view of God is derived. Things that have happened in a person's life and relationships that a person has had played a significant part in the forming of a persons view or concept of God.

It does not stop there because how a person then sees God will also have an effect on how people look at and interact with other people in the context of relationships.

This problem really runs the full circle and most people do not even recognize it as a problem in the first

place. The ultimate goal is not to pass blame and point fingers. Instead it is to recognize and respond to the Father and His incredible love for each and every person.

The goal of every believer should be intimacy with the Father through the Son. The predominant issue of intimacy is a willingness to be completely known by the other person. If an individual does not believe that the Father is truly for them and not against them it will be a very difficult pursuit to find that place of intimacy in the Father's heart.

It is the desire and determination of every person to find security, identity, and belonging. The place that this is truly found is in the Father's heart. If a person has a distorted or damaged view of God they will move in another direction to get these basic needs met.

This works counterproductive as a person fills their needs illegally then their immediate response may be to run from the Father instead of running to the Father. The view that a person has of God has a direct effect on which direction they will go.

The heart of the matter can be summed up in this statement: The lens through which a person primarily views the Heavenly Father is their relationship or lack of

relationship with their earthly father.

There was a study that was conducted in September 2001 by Manya A. Brachear entitled *Study: Americans not losing religion*². The research was conducted over several years and was extensive and thorough in its scope. The questions asked were about God, His character, and behavior.

What the researchers discovered was that Americans overwhelmingly had four distinct views of God and His nature and character traits. The following is a telling quote from the article that was written.

A person's view of God directly affects how an individual sees the world and interacts with others in society, said Byron Johnson, a sociology professor and co-director of the Institute for studies of Religion at Baylor, a Baptist university in Waco, Texas. Catholic and mainline protestant participants opted for a distant God. White Evangelicals or Black Protestant Southerners described God as authoritarian-highly engaged and angry. Midwesterners leaned toward highly engaged but

² Manya Brachear, "Study: Americans Not Losing Religion, published September 12, 2006; available from <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1700108/posts>; internet; accessed on July 1, 2007.

not so angry - a benevolent God.

We do not know every person's experiences and circumstances, however we do see that different people have differing views of who God is, and what He is really like. This is just looking at those people that would be classified as Christians.

It is my belief that the devil has done his best to damage the concept of the earthly father because of the direct effect it has on people as they try and view the Perfect Heavenly Father.

A distorted and damaged view of God has an effect on the majority of the church and society as a whole. When confronted with this fact of a faulty image of the Father most people would strongly disagree. One reason may be that it is something that is acted upon through the subconscious and not the rational mind. An action is simply a manifestation of a belief structure in a person's life.

In his book *A Dad Shaped Hole* Norman H. Wright makes this statement in regard to how a person views God:

What we believe about God really comes to the forefront when we are hurting. And so often what

I hear is what people wish God would be rather than who He is according to Scriptures.³

To further clarify the point of this problem, here are the words out of the mouth of one of Wrights counselees in relation to the damage that their father caused." The hole in my heart is in the shape of my father. Physical surgery won't repair the hole. It will take something like emotional surgery or healing for it to slowly close." (Wright,2005,p.12).

When a person has a damaged or distorted view of God based on their relationship with their earthly father it is important to recognize it and then proceed to discovering who the Father really is, and what He is really like.

I still have to remind myself that my fathers God is not God; that I see Him through a murky film that took years to develop and will therefore take at least as long for me to scrape the crud off to see Him as He truly is.

(Wright,2005,p.57).

The issue is not to point fingers and pass blame at fathers or those that filled the father role. What becomes

³ Wright, Norman H. (2005). A Dad Shaped Hole In My Heart. Bloomington: Bethany House. (pg 16).

important is to have the courage and humility to recognize what effects have been experienced in life based on this relationship principle.

The next step is to allow God the Father to minister to those areas of life that hurt, pain, and disappointment have ruled and where the peace and presence of God has been absent. One way that this becomes possible is to have a proper and developing understanding of who the Father really is that is found in the scripture.

Back To Basics - A Biblical Blueprint

In order to be an effective and thorough builder it is necessary that you follow a blueprint. As long as things are going smoothly and at a comfortable pace it probably seems to the most experienced builders to slow down progress, whenever they have to refer to the blue prints. On the other hand someone new and less experienced might have a greater appreciation for the security and stability that a blueprint provides.

An educated guess would be that a blueprint is most necessary when an unresolved problem arises. Being able to go back to the original blueprint does not only bring clarity, but also an ability to correct errors.

In the same way people have been given an outline for relationships that is called the Bible. When a person is a new believer that blueprint is well referenced. As a person becomes a more "mature" believer sometimes the blueprint becomes available but not necessary until a significant problem presents itself.

Just a few pages earlier we presented a dilemma that requires the reader to research the relational blueprint once again and find out who the Father really is. The hope is that as the truth of God's spoken word transforms the mind it will seep into the heart and start to have an effect on actions both consciously and subconsciously.

We will look at who the Perfect Heavenly Father really is in the Bible and see how He has never changed and has never moved from His place of being perfect Love. Whether we refer to the Old Testament or the New, He never changes.

Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all

creation, became his prized possession. (James 1:17-18 NLT).

There are many references to the nature and character of the Father that are found in the Old Testament. One that definitely provides an crystal clear picture of who the Father is can be found in the Book of Exodus.

Then the LORD came down in a cloud and stood there with him; and he called out his own name, Yahweh. ⁶The LORD passed in front of Moses, calling out, "Yahweh! The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy!I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.⁷ I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children and grandchildren; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations."

(Exodus 34:6-7,NLT)

This scripture passage tells us that from the Perfect Heavenly Father's own mouth, He is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger, and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. The promise that He gives us, the believer,

is that He will lavish on us, His children, unfailing love, and forgiveness of sin and rebellion.

This is the Biblical blueprint that lays the foundation for a relationship with our Perfect Heavenly Father. The Father despite our hiccups, hang-ups, and outright hostility toward Him is determined to direct His compassion, mercy, and love towards us and every other generation that came before us and that will follow after us. It is His delight to lavish us with His love regardless of our response.

This was even before the New Covenant that assures us the absolute authority and honor to not only be accepted and forgiven, but the right to become adopted sons and daughters of the Perfect Heavenly Father.

In the New Testament one does not have to go very far to see an accurate picture of who the Perfect Heavenly Father is. All that is necessary is to look to the Savior to see a reflection of the Father. A reference to this fact can be found in Hebrews 1:3:

³He [Jesus Christ] brightly reflects God's glory and is the exact representation of His

being, and upholds the universe by His all-powerful word. After securing man's purification from sin He took His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:3, N.T. in Modern Speech).

Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, is the exact representation of the nature and character of the Father. To see Jesus is to see the Father in all His glory and splendor. Allow the undisputed truth of these words to move from your head to your heart as you recognize that every time you see the Savior Jesus ministering in humility and love it is just an extension of the Perfect Heavenly Father and His love for humanity.

As you recall each and every moment that you have felt close to Jesus and have felt His presence it is just a reminder that the Father was there also.

Restoring the Foundation of the Father's Love

The Apostle Paul is very clear and concise when it comes to what a believer needs to be rooted and grounded in to experience life that is exceedingly and abundantly more than a person could genuinely hope for. "Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong." (Ephesians

3:17b NLT). Paul tells the believers in Ephesus that being rooted and grounded in love is a foundational principle to living in the vast experience of the Perfect Heavenly Father's love on a daily basis.

In order to see that as a reality in the life of a believer it becomes necessary to renew the mind with the truth of who the Father really is, and what He is actually like.

Again the Apostle Paul tells a group of believers the way to be transformed and to know the will of the Father is by renewing the mind. The process of renewal is a life long pursuit of capturing the Heart of the Perfect Heavenly Father and to experience His embrace.

²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2, NKJV).

The process of renewal means a complete change for the better through renovation. The evidence that the relationship that a person has with their earthly father can hinder or hurt the way a person relates to their

Perfect Heavenly Father is overwhelming. That is why it becomes critical that as a believer this process of renewing the mind is pursued passionately.

It is not as much about changes on the outside as much as it is referring to the transformation from the inside out. When the truth of God's calming word eventually takes root in a believer's heart then actions will start to reflect the reality of how they see the Father and how they believe that He sees them.

We will look further into this principle of renewal and at a starting point for believers to use as they immerse themselves in truth that leads to transformation.

Reformation that Restores

As individual believers are restored into an intimate relationship with their Perfect Heavenly Father the immediate results can be felt by those around them. A person who has personally experienced the Father's love has a greater capacity to love others. The most important people that are affected are those closest to the person experiencing the Perfect Heavenly Fathers love.

As this reality spills out of the family it will then have an effect on anyone else that the Father's sons and

daughters come into contact with. The promise from scripture is that in the last days the Father will return the hearts of the father's to the children and vice versa.

⁵"Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives. ⁶His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers.

Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6, NLT)

We see this happening today, despite the Devil's determined focus to steal, kill, and destroy the relationships that best represent the heart of the Father. As each and everyone that has experienced the incredible love of the Father makes an unwavering decision to walk in that reality

daily. The direct effect is that society will be reformed with a reformation of the Father's Love. The church will once again become a safe place for those that have been bruised, beaten, and broken.

It seems as though the Perfect Heavenly Father always has an answer whenever Satan attempts to deceive, devour,

and destroy. Despite the crisis in our land of Fatherlessness, the Father stands ready to answer the cry of the heart for the masses that desperately need a fathers love.

Before every major revival there has been social crisis in the land. Then God brings a fresh outpouring of His grace and begins to meet the need of the social crisis...The social crisis of our nation and the world is fatherlessness. God is revealing His Father's heart to His children because it is difficult being tender, loving parents until we have experienced the affectionate love of a father's and mother's heart. As the Father's love meets our need, His love flowing through us can begin to meet the need of the crisis in the nations.⁴

This is exactly what the Father desires to do in each and every person and in turn the nations. The pursuit is to become an exact representation of the nature and character of the Father. In order for that to become a certainty it is necessary to have a revelation of the Father's heart and

⁴ Frost, Jack (2002). Experiencing The Fathers Embrace. Lake Mary. Charisma House. P. 205

a reformation in the way that the church relates today. It is often said that it is about relationships, and that is correct. Each person must be willing to not only know but be known and that requires risk, being real, and transparency.

Reformation is the result of each individual taking responsibility to pursue the Father with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. The result is the nations touched by a reformation not of religion but real relationship that touches every single person within reach.

What we need is a reformation—a radical change within the church and our families that will sweep across America and restore the hearts of husbands and wives to each other and the hearts of parents to their children...His plan in the last days is for the restoration of the family—for the hearts of fathers and mothers to turn back to their children, for love and intimacy to flourish between husbands and wives. (Frost, 2002, pp. 205-6).

As this love and intimacy from the Father is experienced it will then flow like a river into the

children, church, and the community resulting in a changed world. What a beautiful picture to see the sufficient power of the Perfect Heavenly Father's love poured out over the nations and people walking free, forgiven, and full of life in intimate relationship daily with the Father.

Chapter One: Recognizing the Problem - A Crack in the Foundation

Depending on who you talk to and what their motivation is will determine how this predominant issue (Crisis of fatherlessness) is addressed and answered. There are those that advocate that it is the source of most social problems and if not prevented it will continue to poison our society. Then there is another group that says that fathers are really not necessary and our current problems have nothing to do with this social issue.

As an example of this position, that fathers are not necessary, one needs to look to the psychology community and listen to some of the voices that are speaking against traditional fatherhood.

In the industry publication *American Psychologist* in their June 1999 issue there was an article titled "Deconstructing the Essential Father"⁵ authored by Dr. Louise B. Silverstein and Carl F. Auerbach from Yeshiva University. They argue that the traditional family is unnecessary in the raising of children in society. I would

⁵ Silverstein, Louise B. and Auerbach, Carl F.. "Deconstructing the Essential Father". Published in June 1999 American Psychologist Journal. Available from <http://deltabravo.net/custody/deconstruct.php> ; accessed on July 1,2007.

encourage anyone that has an interest in this topic to read the entire article. For the purposes of this paper I will highlight some of the statements made to build a picture of the position taken by some when it comes to fathers and their importance in society today. In their abstract to this position paper the authors make the claim that:" Neither mothers nor fathers are essential to child development, and that responsible fathering can occur within a variety of family structures."

The interesting article goes on to make a case that there can be alternatives to the traditional family structure for encouraging responsible fathering that does not discriminate against mothers or alternative family structures (homosexual).

These authors continue to argue against the fundamental principle that fathers are essential and an important part of the family. As a matter of fact here is what they say in their own words:" We do not believe that that the data support[s] the conclusion that fathers are essential to child well-being, and that heterosexual marriage is the only social context in which responsible

fathering is most likely to occur."

Wow! That is a bold statement and it flies in the face of what we see in society on a daily basis. It is important to understand that there are those that carry this belief with them and their goal and desire is to extinguish the essential father from our society.

Most people that you would speak to today would disagree with this extreme position and with a presentation of the evidence, of the result of fatherlessness, would declare that there is a social crisis that needs to be addressed.

Over the last several years one of the groups that would be considered a strong advocate for the crucial capacity of father would be the National Fatherhood Initiative. This is a group that is dedicated to seeing fathers dutifully fulfill their crucial role in society. In 2004 they put together a publication entitled *Father Facts* and included in this book was the "Top Ten Father Facts"⁶ that I believe give irrefutable evidence that there is a social crisis that is stemming from fatherlessness. Here are those Father Facts, I

⁶ Wayne F. Horn and Tom Sylvester, "Top Ten Father Facts", *Father Facts* fourth edition, 2004; available from <http://www.fatherhood.org/fatherfacts/topten.htm>; accessed on July 1, 2007.

challenge the reader to judge if there is a problem or not.

In the United States there is on a daily basis twenty-four million children (34%) that do not live with their biological father. This means that each day little boys and girls everywhere have to look to alternatives to find security, significance, and belonging.

As a country we have twenty million children (27%) that live in single parent households. This is not to discredit the incredible job that single parents do to raise their children, however many of them would tell you that it would be much easier and meaningful if they had help from the other parent on a daily basis.

In the year 2000 a total of 1.35 million babies (33%) were born into a family structure other than the traditional marriage (man and woman.) This leaves a large amount of children that from the very start have an environment absent of commitment that lasts. I am reminded of what David Blankenhorn plainly says about the significant value of traditional marriage in his book *Fatherless America*:

Steady weakening of marriage as an institution that brings order and meaning to men's lives. As

marriage weakens, more and more men become isolated and estranged from their children and from the mothers of their children. One result, in turn is the spread of male violence. Across societies, married fatherhood is the single most reliable, and relied upon, prescription for socializing males... The Cultural antidote for male violence is a monogamous marriage and responsible fatherhood, the breeding ground for it [male violence] are casual sex, family fragmentation, and non-marital childbearing.⁷

Within fifteen years of "I Do" forty-three percent of first marriages end in divorce. Out of those dissolved relationships approximately sixty percent of them have children that are caught in the cross-fire. This means that each year the United States produces enough broken homes to leave one million children devastated from the severe damage of divorce.

Combine these two things; single parent homes and divorce and the results are 3.3 million of our children that live with an unmarried or cohabiting parent. The

⁷ David Blankenhorn (1995). *Fatherless America*. New York: Harper Perennial, pp.38-39

number of children that live with a cohabiting couple has almost doubled since 1990 from 891,000 to a staggering 1.7 million.

Father's that are able to live with their children are able to have closer relationships than their counterpart's who do not physically live with their children. It has been determined that the best indicator of father presence in the home is marital status. Those children that are born into the traditional family have a three times less likely chance to experience father absence. Those children who are less fortunate and are born into a home that is not a traditional family model (Mother and Father married) have a four times greater chance to experience father absence during their childhood.

In the homes that have experienced father absence (father does not physically live in the home) Forty percent of those children have not physically seen their father during the past year. Fifty percent of those boys and girls have never stepped a foot into their father's home. One of the reasons may be because twenty-six percent of those fathers live in different states as their children.

This next statement is at best controversial, but is not meant to demean the incredible job that some single

parents do. I do believe that the evidence shows that the ideal situation is when dad and mom are both involved in raising their children.

Those children who unfortunately and through no fault of their own live absent their biological father have a three times more likely chance to experience poverty, drug use, and experience problems in the areas of education, health, emotional development, and behavior. These children are also at a greater risk to become innocent casualties of child abuse and to become involved in criminal activity in greater numbers than their peers who live with their married, biological (adoptive) parents.

Since the year 1960 right up to 1995 the amount of children that live in single parent homes has tripled. This means that in 1960 only 9% of the children lived in a single parent home, but in 1995 the figures rapidly grew to an astounding 27%. The good news is that from 1995 to 2000 this figure slightly declined and the amount of children living in two parent homes remains stable.

Those children that are fortunate enough to have a home where daddy is present have a significantly greater chance to do well in school, have a healthy self-esteem, exhibit empathy and pro-social behavior, and avoid high

risk behavior like drug use, truancy, and criminal activity. This comes from the fact that with both parents present, there is a greater chance to experience an atmosphere of love, security, significance, and belonging as these children grow up.

These preceding facts, every time that I read them, still leave me breathless and broken. In my humble opinion the evidence is irrefutable that the father is a very important part of a child's life and when that piece of the puzzle is missing or misplaced it can have a very devastating effect on children that will follow them even into their adult lives.

Fingerprints on the glass

Fathers influence, impact, and impart to their children more than is readily recognized. This influence is a lifelong and lasting imprint for the good or bad. "Best recognized in what you remember of your father's words and actions in relationship to you as a child." (Wright, 2005,p.12). The essential goal is not to pass blame, but to recognize that our fathers for the good or bad have had and continue to have a great influence in our lives. The residue of this can be definitely noticed in individual's lives on a daily basis.

As I am writing this, I just finished having a brief conversation with someone who volunteered this statement, "I remember when my dad used to hang me up by my legs and beat my a--!" This man then continues to say that as a result of these actions by his father, whenever he feels like he is cornered by another man the "rage" just comes out. His reaction is to want to do the same thing to whoever is the object of his rage. This is a concrete example that our fathers leave a lifelong lasting imprint on our lives.

Wright(2005) makes the simple statement that "Who you are today was shaped by your father"(p.9). This does not mean that your father was your only influence, however he was one of the greatest influences to not only how you relate to other people but also to how you relate to God the Father. We will spend the majority of the remainder of this work directly talking about this issue and how to overcome the sometimes faulty portrait that our fathers left us.

Community Collapse

This has a direct effect on the erosion of society "As we witness the collapse of fatherhood as a social role for men, we become confused and divided about the very nature

and meaning of fatherhood."(Blankenhorn,1996,p.11).

When the institution of the father is belittled, demeaned, and outright attacked it is impossible to separate damage and destruction that is accomplished into categories. The damage and destruction in the direct attack on fatherhood cannot stop before it slowly creeps into the central area of how someone relates to the Perfect Heavenly Father.

We didn't get here overnight!

These problems did not just present themselves overnight according to Blankenhorn: "Today's fragmentation of fatherhood represents the end point of a long historical process...over the past two hundred years, fathers have gradually moved from the center to the periphery of family life." (Blankenhorn,1996, p.12).

This erosion has been a process that has gradually affected society. Through a variety of venues the onslaught against fathers has been waged and unfortunately fathers themselves have been part of this process from the very beginning.

The fact that fathers (parents) play a major role in how children grow up and interact with other people is a very well known fact. Each time that a parent interacts or reacts to their children, there is left on them an imprint

that will either help or hinder their children in knowing who God really is. The following quotes clearly illustrate this fact:

I have come to understand how important it is for us to be willing to face the things that we don't even want to admit are in us...the way that you view life is in large part the result of your family interactions and experiences.

(Wright,2005,p.10).

Wright continues to illustrate the problem when he says "Many people struggle with problems-both physical and emotional-that are directly related to their relationship with their earthly father."

(2005,p.9).

Here is what J.B. Phillips says about how men have an affect on other people." Men are not isolated units and their every action in some degree affects other people."⁸

The goal again is not to pass blame or point fingers, but it is about recognizing that our relationship with our father has had (and probably continues) to have an effect on how each person relates to God.

⁸ Phillips, J.B.(1961). Your God is Too Small. New York. Macmillan Company,(p. 95)

It is a question not of if, but how and how much "have my parents negatively and positively shaped my perception of God?".⁹

The role a parent plays in shaping a child's view of God is palpable and unavoidable...parents are your first and most formidable window into affection, acceptance, strength, tenderness, authority, stability, and love. Their ability to give you what you need, as well as their inability to do so, all goes into the mix of who you perceive God to be and how you experience him well beyond your childhood. (Stevens,2006,p.80).

Phillips an early advocate for this topic made this startling statement before most even hinted at it. "The early conception of God is almost invariably founded upon the child's idea of his father."(1961,p.19).

Filling The Void

So it is clear to see that a person's relationship with their earthly father has had or is having a direct effect on how they relate to God.

We have also seen clearly that we are actively experiencing a severe crisis of fatherlessness in our society. The

⁹ Stevens, Jarrett (2006). The Deity Formerly Known As God. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. (p.77)

objective is not to make natural fathers perfect or hold them to an unreachable standard, but the aim and goal is to respond to the Perfect Heavenly Father in the right way and with a clear understanding about who He is and what He is really like.

It now becomes clear this has become difficult because the lens through which people view Him has become cracked. Unless people recognize this as fact and respond to the Perfect Heavenly Father's love they will spend their life looking for unconditional love in all the wrong places.

It is a primary part each parent plays in their children's lives to cultivate an atmosphere of unconditional love, acceptance, and belonging. "Parents play such a primary role in a child's need for love, acceptance, and belonging that when they fail or are gone the child becomes desperate to fill the resulting void¹⁰." (Davis,1991,p.20).

We are people who consciously and even unconsciously move through life seeking to find a 'father.' And though some would sooner forget the image of their father...the need for a good father figure can continue to be a strong motivation throughout their life. (Davis,1991,p.20).

¹⁰ Davis, Phil. (1991). The Father I Never Knew. Colorado Springs: Nav Press. (p. 20)

As another example of the reckless result of father absence or father wounding listen to what Pastor James Robison says as he describes his own life:

His lack of involvement deeply wounded me and created a terrible sense of insecurity, guilt and fear, feelings that handicapped me emotionally for many years. It was only when I met Jesus, and He introduced me to His perfect, heavenly Father, that I was able to overcome the hurts of the past and find real meaning in life¹¹. (Robison,1996,p.8).

Robison's statement really sums up the purpose of this author: help people identify the essential need for a homecoming to the heart of the Perfect Heavenly Father, to release forgiveness to those that have hurt or wounded them, and to forgive themselves. As a result they will be restored back into intimate relationship with their Perfect Heavenly Father and will find their rightful place as sons and daughters of destiny living comfortably in the Perfect Heavenly Father's House.

No matter where a person may find themselves right now or how much they have gone through it is never too late to

¹¹ Robison, James. (1996). Knowing God As Father. Fort Worth: Life Outreach International. (p. 8)

come home and the door is always open. The wonderful truth is that the Perfect Heavenly Father is positioned on the porch ready to make the leap and come running toward anyone, as soon as they head for home.

No wound too deep no scar too long

It doesn't matter how deeply you may have been wounded emotionally and psychologically by not receiving the love you needed from an earthly father. The unfathomable and everlasting love of God can make up for all you missed. **His love can heal all your wounds** and remove all your scars. As it fills and pours out of your heart, it can enable you to forgive and love others, just as He forgives and loves you! (Robison,1996,pp.44-45).

The picture here is that regardless of a persons situation the Perfect Heavenly Father has the Holy Spirit positioned to pour out the agape love of the Perfect Heavenly Father into their life and to fill every scar and situation that has kept them from the position of intimacy and belonging.

I want to now prepare to look at, with the guidance and direction of Holy Spirit, what the Perfect Heavenly Father looks like and began to recognize His nature and character. How each person relates to God is going to have

a huge impact on how a person will relate to other people. When a person starts to relate to God as their Perfect Heavenly Father it will change everything about them as they realize that He is for them and not against them.

The very well known author C.S. Lewis said that "I do not want my image of God, I want God." That is exactly what every believer should want, a relationship with God and not the poor representation that most have seen and grown up with.

Through my countless hours of researching this subject I have compiled a great deal of quotes and my aim is to share with the reader many of these quotes to demonstrate the hunger and the pursuit of others in their quest of the Perfect Heavenly Father.

The most important thing about you is who you believe God is. Tell me what comes into your mind when you think about God, and I will tell you everything else about your life. Everything about you flows from your understanding of who God is...your true, intimate knowledge of God is what upholds your life and gives it direction, purpose, and strength¹². (Lawson, 2000, p. 25).

¹² Lawson, Steve. (2000). Made In Our Image. Sister's: Multnomah Press. (P. 25)

Another strong statement pointing to this:

The most portentous fact about any man is not what he says or does at any given time, but what deep in his heart he conceives God to be like....who we believe God is impacts every area of our lives-our attitudes, priorities, choices, and even our destiny. (Lawson,2000,p.25).

And yet another truth telling quote that challenges the reader from Lawson (2000) is:.

Like a mind-altering drug that inhibits one's ability to function properly, a warped view of God destroys the spiritual compass of one's soul. (p.44).

It is apparent and evident that regardless of what a person has heard or has been taught how they "really" see and genuinely believe God to be has a great effect on each life. A warped view of who God is guarantees one a personal life that is lacking security, significance, and belonging. "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." This was a quote from A.W. Tozer. (Lawson,2000,p.11).

What has happened is that the enemy of our souls the devil has crept into our lives, our homes, our churches,

and communities and has subtly carved away at the image of God so that we have a hard time seeing Him as He really is. It is my intention as an author to help us restore the foundation which is a reality of the Perfect Heavenly Father and His unconditional love. This is accomplished by presenting an accurate representation of His nature and character.

Satan has crept undetected into our lives and churches, whispering in our ears time and again...causing us to question His holiness, love, sovereignty, and righteousness...we [the church] have allowed the devil to distort our view of God. (Lawson,2000,p.47).

Now is the critical time to go to the enemy's camp and take back what he stole from each person. It is time to have a revelation of the Perfect Heavenly Father and His love and to learn how to renew our minds with the absolute truth of who the Perfect Heavenly Father is and who each believer is as sons and daughters. This will lead to the role each believer has in the reformation of society as they walk in and give away the Perfect Heavenly Father's love to each person that they meet.

Chapter Two: Reaching Out To the Masses.

The following are the ten questions that I asked each person that was interviewed for this project.

Interview Questions:

1. Age
2. Sex
3. Religious Preference
4. Who raised you?
5. Give me three words that describe your natural father.
6. Give me three words that describe God the Father.
7. Please agree or disagree with this statement:
 "How I view my Heavenly Father is directly
 affected by my relationship or lack of
 relationship with my earthly father."
8. When I fail how does God the Father feel about me?
9. On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you describe your relationship with the Heavenly Father? 1 is that God is distant and uninvolved and 10 is that I have a face to face growing relationship.
10. What is necessary for you to get closer to God?
11. When do you feel closest to God?
12. Is it ok to disagree with God?

13. If so, how does God feel about you when you disagree?

Participation Breakdown of people interviewed.

In order to contribute a broad sampling for the particular purposes of this relevant research I drew from three different sources. I asked for volunteers in the family counseling program at the State Correctional Institute, Dallas, Pa. The people that were classified as general included people from the local Wilkes-Barre area. The last category were the people that responded to a posting on a myspace.com forum focused on religion. To the best of my knowledge each participant was honest and forthright. I did not try and sway results by picking and choosing participants. Each participant was guaranteed that they would remain anonymous.

The following is a breakdown of the participants of this survey:

Dallas S.C.I.	29
General	8
Myspace	10
<hr/>	
Total	47

Religious Preference of participants

Christian/Protestant	29
Catholic	1
Muslim	8
No Preference/ left blank	3
Other	6
<hr/>	
Total	47

Note: the "other" category included one each of the following religious preference; agnostic, atheist, Buddhist, mystic, deist, and an existentialist.

Age range based on information provided

Christian/Protestant	25-63 years old
Catholic	27 years old
Muslim	26-48 years old
No Preference/ left blank	29-54 years old
Other	63-18 years old

The Thesis Question and the answers that were provided.

"The primary lens through which I view my Heavenly Father is my relationship or lack of relationship with my earthly father".

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>
Christian/Protestant	10 (34%)	19 (66%)
Catholic	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
Muslim	1 (13%)	7 (87%)
No Preference/ left blank	1	2
Other	1	5
<hr/>		
Total	13 (28%)	34 (72%)

Influences of the participants while Growing Up.

38% of the people interviewed were raised at least in part by both their natural mother and father. This means that 62% of those interviewed grew up without their natural father being consistently present.

Regarding the Christian/Protestant response the numbers were the same eleven out of twenty seven (38%) grew up with both parents in their lives consistently.

How's Your Relationship with God?

Question: On a scale of 1-10 where is your relationship with Father God?

	<u>Average Answer</u>
Christian/Protestant	6.7
Catholic	2
Muslim	7.6
No Preference/ left blank	1.5
Other	1.3

Is It Ok to Disagree with God?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
Christian/Protestant	14 (48%)	11 (38%)	3 (10%)	1 (4%)
Catholic	1			
Muslim	1 (12.5%)	6 (75%)	1 (12.5%)	
No Preference/ left blank		1	1	1
Other	4		1	1
<hr/>				
Total	20	18	6	3

When I disagree this is how God feels about me:

Examples of the Christian response:

"He feels depressed, shame, and that we let Him down".

"Can't say that He would be upset, but He will show you a way that you will have to agree with Him".

"He is patient with me and knows I am still under construction living and growing in His grace".

"Disappointed He is a Jealous God".

"I am sure that he is not happy, His word is law".

"He would tell me to read my Bible and He would be disappointed. If I read my Bible then I wouldn't disagree because God is perfect".

"I have disagreed with Him on occasion. He'll let me do my own thing, and then patiently show me where I was wrong. I've never felt God was angry with me for disagreeing with Him, but like a patient father, tries to show me my errors."

"I do not believe that God interferes with life and I've never spoken to him so I would not know if he disagree or agrees".

The majority of the Christians that responded said that although the Father is disappointed in them when they disagree, He still loves them even if when they disagree

with Him.

Example of the Muslim response:

"It will take you out of the fold".

"God would be proud because we don't always approve of what He does. If I did not disagree it would be an unbalanced relationship".

The consensus was that God would be disappointed.

Other notable responses:

"He's pissed"

"I disagree with the Biblical God everyday, and I'm fine".

"Irelevent [sic] he dumps on us wheather[sic] or not we do".

When I fail How Does God feel about me?

The Christian response to this question was overwhelmingly that even if a person fails the Father still loves them, however He is disappointed in their actions.

Below are a few quotes from the Christian participants:

"when I fail I am usually expectant of His wrath. At the very least, I expect that He will ignore me. I always feel I have to wait a while (and put in some good behavior time) before approaching Him again".

"Sorry, ashamed, and disappointed".

"Probably disappointed just like regular father".

Muslim Response.

The Muslim response was that God is a forgiving God and although disappointed forgiveness is always available.

"Doors of mercy are always open, you can disobey but the doors of forgiveness are always open".

"Only able to tell how He [God] feels on the day of Judgment".

"The more I obey He loves, the more I disobey the angrier He gets".

No Preference example of responses.

It seems that those who were classified as no preference were more on the negative side than undecided. This became apparent based on the answers to this question.

"I don't think He cares".

"What a conceited question".

"Probably a little disappointed, but He is forgiving".

Catholic Response to this question.

"Start over, try harder next time".

Other Responses that were notable.

Regarding those interviewees, considered others, they responded basically in such a way that communicates God does not care about people or concerned about what they do.

"God if it exists does not give a damn one way or another".

"Irrelevant GOD shits on people wheather [sic] they done anything or not".

"God I believe is an essence and responds through me not to me".

What is necessary to get closer to God?

Here are some of the answers that were given by the Christian participants:

"Well I know the 'churchy' or 'Holy' response- Christ died for us all, and through His blood we were all made righteous. Because of His work on the cross we have the privilege of approaching the throne of God as sons and daughters. However, for me, those words have never really sunk in as reality. They seem to be mere words on a page".

"Don't know- I don't feel real close to Him".

"Striving in right direction to correct faults (sin) I have. Believing and trusting".

"Strive to live a righteous life, do unto others, and be the best person that you can be".

The majority of responses from those that defined themselves as Christians had something to do with their individual actions. This included; reading the word more,

praying more, serving people more, and obeying more.

Muslim Response

The consensus is that the individual in order to get closer to God has to do something. Action is a necessity.

"More belief".

"Doing what you are supposed to, staying away from evil, enjoying the good, and make prayers".

"Committing myself more and being straightforward in my decision to follow a religious direction. Stop being confused".

"Everything that I do I do for His sake and seek His pleasure".

"Obedience, praying, reading, and positive actions".

"Practice and participation in the five pillars".

Other Responses

"I would need to know (experience) that He is there".

"Prostration".

"Give His followers and reps lots of money and maybe He will be nicer".

When do you feel closest to the Father?

Christian response

"When I read His Word".

"never".

"I don't know".

"During corporate worship, in church".

"When I surrender my will".

"When I am in trouble and need Him the most".

"When I am outside in my garden".

"Quiet moments and times of prayer".

"All the time".

"When I am hurting".

The most obvious and common answer was while a person is in church. The one response that I found the most interesting is that several people responded ,it was in their weakest moments that they felt closest to the Father.

Muslim Response

"When I make prayer".

"When I am in prostration (prayer)".

"When I make salat".

Clearly those that were interviewed that were Muslim consistently felt closest to God during times of prayer.

This was not what one would consider a "scientific" research project, however I believe that the responses showed a consistent pattern of how many people think about God on a daily basis. There is still much more to be learned, however I am convinced that this research points

to the problem that I have been pointing out.

Let us now progress to the solution and the seismic shift necessary in the body of Christ a revelation of the Perfect Heavenly Father.

Chapter Three: Responding Biblically

Introduction

I am convinced that a large number of Christians struggle on a daily basis with seeing God as the Perfect Heavenly Father. This foundational truth is essential to experiencing a full and fulfilling relationship with God. Each person must be reminded that without truly knowing God as their Perfect Heavenly Father, there will be a barrier to intimacy with God.

The late Jack Frost in his first book *"Experiencing the Father's Embrace"* made this point clearly and concisely in the foreword of his book:

I believe with all my heart that the message of the Fathers' love is one of the most important messages to be shared in today's world. It is central to one's relationship with God. It is central to one's relationships with others. And it has the power to unlock healing and restoration like the world has never seen... When our motivation is anything outside of the love of God, the foundations on which we build our lives become cracked, and eventually they will fail. Our ministries struggle, our families

suffers and our relationship with God lacks the intimacy that He desires to have with us. (Frost, 2002,ix).

In the previous passage we are reminded that if a person does not experience this relationship with the Perfect Heavenly Father, then they are on a faulty foundation that is bound to fail. It is important to understand that the person walking without a revelation of the Perfect Heavenly Father's heart is not the only one to suffer the consequences of this incomplete and inaccurate theology.

Love is incomplete wherever we look. Love is incomplete on all sides of every relational fence. Fathers and mothers do not love very well, and sons and daughters mistake what love exists for unlove, and in their immaturity and rebellion do not love very well in return. Love everywhere has broken down. We are imperfect vessels. The human mirror of fatherhood and motherhood is cracked and its images of God's character are blurred, distorted, and vastly incomplete.¹³
(MacDonald,2005,p.190).

¹³ George MacDonald (2005). *Your Life In Christ*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, p.190.

The place that a person often sees this come to bear in their life is in the intellectual understanding of who God is, but not being able to experience and reasonably relate at the heart level. A person can read countless scriptures and quote verses until they are blue in the face; however without a proper understanding of the identity of God saturating their whole being and then transforming them into His likeness the possibility and the probability of living a victorious life are slim to none. This can happen to the best and the brightest or the down and out it does not matter.

I clearly speak from experience for many years growing up I formed an inaccurate picture of the Perfect Heavenly Father from my incomplete theology, experiences, and relationships. What I found was far from the reality of who God is. This resulted in me running from Him and not toward Him when I failed. As a matter of fact this happened so much that eventually I just quit trying. It needs to be pointed out that if someone had just told me at the time that I had a wrong picture of God, I most likely would have not believed them. I genuinely thought my picture was accurate, and it was of a God who was easily angered and not quick to be appeased by my attempts at good behavior

and righteous rituals.

What I had created unknowingly and unwillingly was a completely inaccurate picture of God. This complete counterfeit formed the baseline of my attempts at a connection with God that truly looked more like a religious partnership with my part in disastrous default.

Rest assured I was not alone in my making of a God in my own image.

Steve Lawson (2000) puts it succinctly:

In their hearts and minds, they create a counterfeit god, one who is not good or kind. Their god, made in their own image, is less than perfectly good... He is a stoic sovereign who runs the universe with robotic dispassion or that He controls the world as one would play a chess match-emotionally detached in His heart from each of the pieces on the board. They think of Him as aloof, distanced, cerebral, and uncaring toward the individuals He made in His image. (pp.139-140).

It is safe to say without much hesitation that there is a great deal of people who feel this way, if not consciously certainly their actions or omissions point to it being a

predominant issue in their unconscious mind.

As a pastor and leader it is essential that I am completely aware of this matter and how it affects those I live, work, and minister too on a daily basis. Sometimes leaders are caught waxing eloquent in their polished pulpits and plush pastoral studies and forget that there are a great deal of people that are struggling not to just believe, but to trust God.

If a person's foundation is not in the Perfect Heavenly Father's love then everything that a pastor is planting is most likely not even able to take root, let alone grow. David Seamands (1981,2002), makes this viable point about trust as a baseline for belief: "When we ask individuals to trust God and to surrender to Him, we are presuming they have concepts/feelings of a trustworthy God who has only their best interests at heart and in whose hands they can place their lives."¹⁴

Trust is something that a person cannot assume is already established in a personal relationship. It is probably more accurate that pastor's should address their congregation as though the congregation has a difficult time trusting God.

¹⁴ Seamands, David (1981,2002). Redeeming the Past. Colorado Springs: Cook Communications p.109

Inside every one of us is a mental picture of God. We often speak of this as our concept of God and talk about it as if it were something completely in our minds. We forget that, along with what we have been taught about God, experiences, memories, and feelings play a large part in forming this picture... It is surprising the number of genuine Christians who are caught in an inner conflict between what they think about God and what they feel about God (and how He feels toward them).(Seamands, 1981, 2002,p.93).

In many ways I feel like a polished and poised prosecuting attorney pounding out my points to bring clarity to my case. With that being said here is another quote.

Our concepts composite mental pictures made up of many different pieces which come to us from various sources. Chief among those which contribute to our concept of God are life experiences, interpersonal relationships, and teachings we have been given... What we have caught is equally so. In fact, our feelings about

God can drastically affect our ideas of God... This crucial fact is overlooked by so many pastors and Christian workers. They assume if the doctrines and ideas they preach and teach are biblically correct, they will automatically clear up a person's concepts of God and enable him to believe in God and trust Him. (Seamands, 1981, 2002, p.94).

When as a pastor I come to the realization that I am not the one that can change people only the Perfect Heavenly Father can, and then I am at a position of understanding and strength. Until I reach this point in my life the majority of my Sunday's and weekday meeting's are an exercise of futility in fostering a real and raw relationship between us and Him (The Perfect Heavenly Father).

Many people live with the reality of a hard to please God, who unless they get it right all the time will not have anytime for them or their problems. Those people persistently swing at the ball of behavior only to strike out more times than they hit. David Seamands puts this into perspective in a way that I wish I could.

Their God is an increasingly demanding tyrant who

requires perfect performance. He is a punitive judge who has no tolerance for imperfection. At the slightest failure, He expresses His displeasure and covers them with condemnation and guilt. This leads perfectionistic Christians to twist the truth, so that they rate their behavior before God higher than their relationship to God. They place conduct before faith, deeds before trust, achieving before receiving, work before worship, and performance higher than relationship... Have oversensitive consciences and live under 'the tyranny of the oughts.' They try to placate their anxiety by the false humility and belittling themselves and overemphasizing doctrines and duties, rules and regulations. But even though they constantly try harder, they are guilt-ridden, fearful, and subject to mood swings and depression. This is because the basis of their relationship with God is performance, not grace... Many such Christians unconsciously take the very channels of grace-repentance, confession, prayer, Bible reading, and Christian service-and turn them into

works. Their attempts to find inner peace and be pleasing to God by reading another chapter, praying another hour, and taking on another job at the church, never succeed. (Seamands, 1981, 2002,p.116).

I know that this is a lengthy introduction, but I believe that it is necessary. The way that Seamands put this in the previous quote distinctly describes what my relationship with God looked like before He whispered those three simple words to my heart, "I Love You." Most people do not want to admit it, but that is exactly what they experience on a daily, if not minute to minute basis in their life.

In their book *The Transformation of the Inner Man* John Sandford (1982) gives the reader a description of how one of their lay persons related to God." At the heart level, she could not believe in a God who loves unconditionally, though her mind was fully convinced and she preached it to others."¹⁵ Again, this describes where the place where a great deal of people live their daily lives. I can vividly remember many days of ministering tirelessly to the masses (ones and tens) and then in the quiet moments of the ride

¹⁵ John & Paula Sandford (1982). *The Transformation of the Inner Man*. Tulsa: Victory House, p.29

home wondering "Can God really love me?" The good news is even though someone may be struggling with those basic questions this does not mean that they have to stay stuck in the mud of misunderstanding.

A few pages later Paula gives a clear account of what she experienced when Father reached down and poured out His love into her heart.

As we continued our trip, these words began to rise from within me as from a deep bubbling fountain, 'He loves me-God loves me-He really loves me!' I had always known that, in my mind, and to some degree with my heart. But this new knowing included the brand-new dimension of assurance that God is on the throne of my life. (Sandford,1982,p.31).

It is amazing to me the amount of freedom that a person experiences when they know that they are loved by the Perfect Heavenly Father not out of duty but delight. When a person experiences the Perfect Heavenly Father's fathomless love, they are forever changed from dismal failure to being fixed in perfect love permanently.

As we have looked at earlier the goal is not to point blame, but to bring awareness that because of sin (not just

personal) and the devil, despite our parents best efforts are picture of the Perfect Heavenly Father is probably faulty.

Even those who have been brought up by the best of parents, and in the most ideal of situations, still have to battle wrong concepts of God. Our own sinfulness, both unchosen and chosen, and Satan, the father of lies, will see to that! Perhaps the most amazing thing about the love of God is that He accepts us in spite of our distorted pictures of Him, and works with us until we gradually come to know Him as He truly is. (Seamands,1981,2002,p.117).

The amazing truth of that statement repeatedly rings in my ears, that despite my faulty picture of the Perfect Heavenly Father, He still loves and accepts me. Each of us is still in a process and daily as we surrender to the absolute truth we become more and more like Him and as a result we begin to see him clearer and with greater clarity.

Nothing in all your life will impact your relationship with God, your relationship with people, your self-view, your decisions, and your

purpose like the way you think of God. Everything in your life consciously or unconsciously comes back to one thing: Whom do you visualize God to be in your heart? Who we are and what we become cannot be separated from our understanding of God.¹⁶ (Ingram,2004,p.31).

Basically the importance of this issue to each of us is that it is the basis for everything. The understanding at the heart level that God is love, and He is the Perfect Heavenly Father will become the starting point of a life of living loved, valued, and accepted by Him.

The very essence of who God is, is love, He cannot operate from anything else other than who He is, that is love. "Perhaps the most important way we all fail to see God is in the most basic-love." (Sandford,1982,p.36).

The blunt truth remains that none of us could see or experience God, unless He chose to reveal Himself, and unless He desires to be known by His creation. This fact then opens the doorway for us to begin to know the Father.

If we're going to see God accurately, as he longs for us to see him, we've got to see him as he's revealed himself. He is not like us and he will

¹⁶ Ingram, Chip (2004). God As He Longs For You To See Him. Grand Rapids: Baker Books

not submit to our reductions. In fact, it's only when we recognize and encounter God-as he is-that we will then make progress toward becoming all that he has created us to be.(Ingram,2004,p.40).

As a believer then it becomes your own responsibility to discover what the Father has said and demonstrated about His nature and character. Not necessarily what others have shown or said, but what He said. R.A. Torrey (1856, 1928) throws down this challenge about making our own assumptions about God and His nature and character. "Who cares what you think? Who cares what I think? The only thing of any real importance is: What does God Himself reveal about Himself in the one Book that is the only God-breathed revelation of God?"¹⁷

The book that He is speaking about is the Bible, God's Holy Word, the authoritative, infallible, inspired word of God. For some people the baseline of their belief in the Bible is that it is the B.I.B.L.E. (basic instructions before leaving earth) and for others it is a complete love story of a Perfect Heavenly Father who is madly and deeply in love with His kids. This is the approach that Torrey takes in his description of the Bible.

¹⁷ R.A. Torrey (1999). Experiencing God's Love. New Kensington: Whitaker House, p.146.

The whole Bible is a love story, the story of the infinite love of an infinitely holy God for a fallen and morally worthless race of sinners, of which you and I are members...The whole Bible, both the Old Testament and the New, is dominated by one thought, the thought that God is love, that love is the very essence of God's moral nature. (Torrey,1999,p.149).

The entire Bible from cover to cover and age to age is a love story that describes the Perfect Heavenly Father and how He relates to His children. This even includes the Old Testament that at times can become a little confusing and crazy to navigate through.

The way that we approach the Word of God will have a great deal to do with how we see God. For many years the only scriptures that I underlined and meditated on were the "thou shalt nots" and the "thou shalt's". If your focus is on your failure and not the Perfect Heavenly Father then it is possible that you have missed the entire point of the written word.

When you and I have an accurate picture of God as seen in the scriptures Satan himself cannot snipe and sabotage you any longer. "The right image of God opens heaven to us.

Hell itself cannot overcome a man or woman who carries the right image of God in their spirit."¹⁸

The truth is that the absolute truth does not change. Leaders and pastors must accurately and effectively communicate the fundamental fact of God's word to the people that the Perfect Heavenly Father has placed in their loving care and influence.

This means that a person called by the Perfect Heavenly Father to be His messenger must navigate the terrain of dealing with subjects that some might say are risky and dangerous. The treacherous terrain that I am going to tread on now is the nature and character of the Perfect Heavenly Father and His unconditional love for His children.

The real risk is that as I explore the enriching word of God, there is a probable chance that people will misinterpret and wrongly apply truth. The accusations are many and the charges are callous that if you preach too much about the Father's unconditional love it will just give people permission to sin. If you preach about greasy grace and sloppy agape then what you will have is a group

¹⁸ Cooke, Graham (2003,2005). God Revealed. Grand Rapids: Chosen Books p.70

of people that have no "doctrinal foundation" on which to live their diligent and dutiful lives directed by the deity in the sky.

Not to point out faults or cause misdirected mudslinging (it's not nice to fight with your family), but for the sake of observation, I share the following:

Whenever we elevate God's love to a preeminent place in our thinking without first considering His holiness, sovereignty, and wrath, we distort the true picture of God. We reduce His love to syrupy, sentimental mush and turn Him into a user-friendly god who pats on the head instead of delivering us from condemnation.(Lawson, 2000,p.125).

And if that did not get your attention read on:

This feel-good message has become the predominant message many churches today In an effort not to offend people or make uncomfortable, preachers do not tell seekers about God's holiness and Wrath. But ignoring this part of God's character diminishes the message of divine acceptance. In extending the free offer the gospel, the user-friendly god makes few or no demands...there is

talk only of a 'loving' god who accepts people just as they are without requiring any commitment or change. (Lawson,2000,p.126).

I am completely aware that the majority of people probably feel the same way as the above author; however I firmly believe that it is the grace and unconditional love of the Perfect Heavenly Father that becomes of immeasurable importance. I believe that it is kindness that leads to repentance not ranting and raving. It was the grace of God that opened the door for me to receive my Perfect Heavenly Father's love. I grew up with a definition of grace, but not an experience in the grace of God. Steve McVey share's something similar in his book *Grace Walk*:

My concept of God has changed since I have come to better understand His grace. Whereas before, I saw Him as a God who demanded my love, now I see Him as Someone I can't help but love, as I come to know Him better. He really is lovable.¹⁹

It is from this position that I want to prepare us to take a fresh look at the Word of God and discover the true Father. To see the Father as He really is will deliver a person to live their life forgiven, free, and full.

¹⁹ McVey, Steve (1995). *Grace Walk*. Eugene: Harvest House p.133

Those of us who minister to wounded souls realize the miracle that happens in the life of a sufferer once he or she gets a true vision of God the Father and the affirming love of the Father starts streaming toward that person. The soul of that person will then begin to see and symbolize God properly; the God of the Scriptures will become his or her full strength and stronghold.²⁰

It is in the inability to properly see the Perfect Heavenly Father that we determine the root of our problems. This is not only as individuals, but also as a society in general. It is the aim of this author to be a part of the solution and not the problem.

Refusal to look up to God as our father is the one central wrong in the whole human affair. The inability to do so is our one central misery. Whatever helps to clear away any difficulty from our recognition of the Father will more or less eliminate every difficulty in life.(MacDonald, 2005,p.165).

²⁰ Leanne Payne (1989,1995). The Healing Presence. Grand Rapids: Baker Books p.135.

Let the pursuit begin to see the Father as accurately as possible in the light of the scripture. Chip Ingram (2004) reminds us that "Until you know God as he is, you'll never become all that he's created you to be." (p.32). I don't know about you, but I can tell you without hesitation that I want all that God has for me and I will not settle for anything less. He has destined each of us for more than we could ever ask for, hope, and imagine. When our understanding of Him becomes clearer, then we are able to live our life as He intended.

As long as I hold onto my wrinkled and worn picture it will be impossible for me to relate or respond to Him as He longs for.

The user-friendly god can produce only a user-friendly life that fails to become all that God intends. Those with a low view of God will live, consciously or subconsciously, at a low level; and the result will be hollow lives and empty existence. Theirs will never be a life full of the joy and effectiveness that glorifies God at every turn. There is no more joyful, contented, and godly life than one that is committed to

glorifying God-the real God-who has revealed to us His intrinsic glory through the Written Word. (Lawson,2000,pp.162-163).

Not only does this image of an inconsistent and irrational God affect the individual, but it also can become a greater problem when that person infects their circle of influence with this infection of an inaccurate God.

Christians with damaged love receptors can take the Good News and turn it into Bad News. This is why so many of them have an uncanny knack of missing the wonderful promises of God's mercy, love, and grace, and consistently selecting Bible passages which emphasize wrath, punishment, judgment, and the unpardonable sin. (Seamands, 1981,2002,p.100).

When a person declines to deal with this faulty image and fails to recognize that it may have to do with their relationship with their father then this in turn can poison and permeate anything that they put their hand to. In fact each relationship that they personally experience will carry on it the residue of unresolved father issues.

Unresolved father issues from childhood can often

be a major cause of emotional pain later in adulthood. Adult pain is often wired to childhood pain. Many family counselors believe that the majority of a child's identity is formed through the father-child relationship. When that relationship becomes skewed, children may grow up with difficulties relating to other male authority figures later in life. And when they come to Christ and become born again, the issues that they have with their earthly fathers often transfer to the new relationship they have with their heavenly Father. (Frost, 2002, pp.92-93).

Until each person has a revelation through either/or experience and a renewing of the mind in the truth it is virtually impossible to relate and respond to God in an accurate way.

Without a personal revelation of the Father's unconditional love, it becomes very easy to propagate the idea of a vengeful, angry God who can't wait to banish us to the fiery pit of hell.. This almost schizophrenic view of the nature of God-that Jesus loves us but His stern

Father is perpetually angry with us-has been ingrained in the mind-set of many Christians. While they can foster a deep and meaningful relationship with Jesus, they are at a loss when it comes to relating to intimacy with Father God. (Frost,2002,p.38).

It is at this point that we now transition to looking at and responding to the way that the Father has revealed Himself in the Scriptures. I am reminded of something that a great thinker George MacDonald said in relation to approaching the Fatherhood of God "Approach God's Fatherhood through the imagination, to imagine the best of all possible Fatherhoods, far better than our broken, shattered, painful, incomplete earthly images. (MacDonald,2005,p.189).

That is our goal in the remainder of this work to see the Perfect Heavenly Father as He desires us to see Him and relate too Him.

Dust Off the Family Album

It can be a very exciting time when you are cleaning out an old storage area, and you discover some old pictures. You are reminded of times past and hopefully those times are filled with marvelous memories and

magnificent moments. For some that is probably not the case.

In the same way as looking at an old family album can bring up emotions and reactions so can cracking open the Bible for those that have an inaccurate picture of the Perfect Heavenly Father.

If I had a dollar for every time I have had someone say to me "If God is a God of love, how do you explain the Old Testament?" I would be a wealthy man. Inevitably people have a problem with the Old Testament and the way that the Perfect Heavenly Father interacted with His children.

As I have said earlier I admit that it is difficult at best to navigate some of the ancient artifacts found in the Old Testament. Each of us has a choice to look through the Bible in it's entirety through a lens of love and grace, or through scope of strict adherence to a massive moral code. The choice is ours and depending on our foundation of trusting God or not, will determine how we view the Bible.

Most of our failure to love and trust God stems from our pictures of God as unlovable and untrustworthy. And most of our anger against Him is not really against the true God but against our unchristian or subChristian concepts of God.

The only encouraging thing about all this is that God knows and understands us. He is not angry with us for our lack of trust or our anger toward Him. Rather, He is very saddened that our false picture of Him keeps us from getting to know Him as He truly is. (Seamands,1981,2002,p.103).

As a person initially starts to navigate through obstacles of the Old Testament to discover what it really says about the Perfect Heavenly Father and His nature and character the conclusion if rooted and grounded in love has to be that He is a God full of mercy and grace that loves you and I. This reality then begins to erase my fear of failure and anger and replaces it with assurance and peace.

When my awareness of who the Father is and what He is really like began to increase, the fear and anger within my person began to subside... When we begin to know what the Father is really like, we start to love Him. As one of the early Church fathers said, 'It is impossible to know God as He really is, and not love Him.' (Mumford,2002,2006 p.18).

In the remainder of this section the challenge then becomes to "take out your wallet-sized, crinkled, and worn

out picture God and set it aside. Let him unveil an amazing portrait of himself. Seeing God as he longs to be seen will change you forever." (Ingram,2004,p.27).

Dust of the album and let's prepare to take a fresh look at the Perfect Heavenly Father the way that He chose to reveal Himself in the Old Testament.

It is not possible to address every scripture in length for the particular objective of this work. I will however highlight certain passages that have had an impact in my life and ministry. I encourage you to take the precious time and discover for yourself the Perfect Heavenly Father as revealed in the Old Testament.

Take a risk and open up your eyes and your heart and see the Father as He longs to be seen. John Sandford (1982)reminds us that "to 'see' God does not refer so much to physical sight as to come to know and comprehend His nature."(p.28).

I am confident that you will find a Perfect Heavenly Father that has, since the foundation of the world, loved each and every one with an unending and inextinguishable love. Brennan Manning illustrates this point with his eloquent comments:

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is

gracious. His love is gratuitous in a way that defies our imagination. It is for this reason that we can proclaim with theological certainty in the power of the Word: God loves you as you are and not as you should be! Do you believe this? That God loves you beyond worthiness and unworthiness, beyond fidelity and infidelity, that He loves you in the morning sun and the evening rain, that He loves you without caution, regret, boundary, limit or breaking point?²¹

I Am

One of the scriptures in the O.T. that becomes a foundation stone in our security as believers is found in the book of Exodus, chapter thirty-four. To set the stage this is a conversation that occurs between the Perfect Heavenly Father and Moses following yet another failure of His people. As Moses listens to the Father reveal Himself this is what the Father had to say:

Then the LORD came down in a cloud and stood there with him; and he called out his own name, Yahweh. The LORD passed in front of Moses, calling out, "Yahweh! The LORD!

²¹ Brennan Manning (1986,2004). The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus. Grand Rapids: Baker House p.25

The *God of compassion and mercy* [italics added]!
I am *slow to anger* [italics added]
and *filled with unfailing love and faithfulness*
[italics added]. *I lavish unfailing love to a
thousand generations. I forgive iniquity,
rebellion, and sin* [italics added]. But I do not
excuse the guilty. I lay the sins of the parents
upon their children and grandchildren; the entire
family is affected—even children in the third and
fourth generations.” (Exodus 34:5-7, New Living
Translation).

This revelation is from the Perfect Heavenly Father's own mouth, despite the continued failures of those that He called His own. I will briefly explore these attributes that the Perfect Heavenly Father reveals about Himself.

The first set of attributes is “God of compassion and Mercy” Bob Mumford describes compassion as “my insides are moved for you in a supernatural way.” (2002, 2006 p.23). To consider that the Perfect Heavenly Father is moved by us in such a way that affects His entire being is an incredible thought. Compassion moves beyond a mere petty concern to a

major motivation and in the case of the Perfect Heavenly Father led to Him sacrificing His Son on our Behalf.

Mercy is another commodity that is unconditionally released on our behalf by the Father that enables us to live forgiven and free. Again, Mumford (2002,2006) explains that:

Mercy is mildness and tenderness of heart which disposes a person to overlook injuries or to treat an offender better than he deserves... The injury of the Church toward a hurting world has been failing to give mercy after receiving His mercy in such abundance. (2002,2006, p.24).

Ouch! The indictment against the institutional church is unfortunately completely accurate. As a whole the church is quick to receive mercy but slow in dispensing His mercy to others that may not merit it in their humble opinion.

The good news is that the Father then reveals himself as "slow to anger" and again the church could learn a valuable lesson by looking at the Perfect Heavenly Father and to understand as Mumford points out "Slow to anger... not being easily provoked and able to patiently bear injuries.(2002,2006, p.23). Again, the church as a whole could benefit revisiting patience and realizing that it

applies to those in the pulpit and the pews. Especially when it comes to ministering to the masses outside of our sacred sanctuaries and beloved buildings.

The Perfect Heavenly Father is "filled with unfailing love and faithfulness" and I am so glad that He is. Even when we are not faithful He is and when we are unlovable, He still loves.

Faithfulness...fixed, determined love, to be kept, guarded, watched over, and preserved...No matter where we go or what we do, God will remain faithful to love, cultivate us out of our sin, and if necessary, discipline us into the freedom of His Kingdom. (Mumford,2002,2006 p.25).

This unfailing love that the Perfect Heavenly Father is He promises He will "lavish on a thousand generations." This of course is not literal, but points that His love will never cease, and it is always fixed on His children. This is all made possible because He is a God of grace. "Grace... the very source of understanding god's person. It means to find favor, kindly, friendly, benevolent, courteous, disposed to show or dispense grace and forgive offenses, and to impart unmerited blessings." (Mumford, 2002,2006,p.23).

The Perfect Heavenly Father then announces that He "forgives iniquity, rebellion, and sin" and that my friend is the good news that each of us has the possibility to experience. There is no better feeling than to walk in the reality of being forgiven and forgiving others. Mumford (2002,2006) says this about the value of forgiveness: "forgive pardoning, remitting, disposed to forgive, inclined to overlook offense, mild, merciful, and compassionate as a forgiving temperament... We [believers] seriously jeopardize our journey toward intimacy when we refuse to forgive.(pp.26-27).

I have to be honest and admit that if the verse stopped there I would be happy, however it does not and to be faithful to the Word, we must keep reading and realize that the Perfect Heavenly Father does love us, and He chooses to release forgiveness to anyone who asks for it from a position of repentance and brokenness. He cannot however allow the guilty to go unpunished unless they reach out for redemption.

Show Me Your Glory!

Back up just one chapter to Exodus 33 and again we see a relevant exchange between the Perfect Heavenly Father and Moses (the Father's friend) that gives us another look at

who the Father really is. The Perfect Heavenly Father is challenging Moses to take His people to the Promised Land, but has told Moses that He will not be joining them and Moses will not move unless the Father goes with them. In this divine dialogue what happens next is nothing short of spectacular. The Father agrees that He will go with them and Moses full of assurance and confidence asks the Father to "show him His glory" and the Father again agrees with Moses request. "The LORD replied, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will call out my name, Yahweh, before you. For I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose." (Exodus 33:19, NLT).

When Moses asks to see the Father's Glory, I am not sure if what he expected is what he received. The Father who could move mountains and part seas chose to reveal His goodness to His friend.

The Glory of God is nothing less than His nature and Character, and He has asked each of us to carry His glory to a hurting world. "The glory consists of the hidden attributes of God being revealed or replicated within His own people." (Mumford, 2002,2006, p.28).,Peter Tan also

defines glory the same way. "Glory of God is a manifestation of His attributes."²²

When Moses asked to see God's glory, God showed His divine attributes of mercy, grace, longsuffering, goodness and truth (Ex 33:18;34:6)...there is a direct relationship between the glory of God and the attributes of God; the attributes of love and mercy. To move in the glory of God is to move in love and mercy. (Tan,1989,p.38).

His glory is simply a reflection or a dimension of His love. "In order to move in the glory of God, we need to move in the love of God." (Tan,1989,p.39). As a believer matures in the Perfect Heavenly Father's love then they become more like Him, and in turn display more of His glory (what Moses saw) in our lives." Development of the glory of God in our lives would ultimately have to do with the alignment and tuning of our nature and attributes with the nature and attributes of God. Attributes of love, mercy, graciousness, truth.etc." (Tan,1989,p.40).

As we continue to progress it becomes important to be reminded of the incredible truth that drives believers and

²² Peter Tan (1989) The Anointing of the Holy Spirit. P.37

their faith that God is love! "The tremendous and stupendous truth that God is love. It is not merely that God loves, but that God is love. In other words, love is the very essence of His moral nature. He is also the Source of all love." (Torrey,1999,p.149).

Singing in the Storm

In a book that most have probably not read a great deal, we see a dark situation unfolding because a group of rebellious people firmly refuse to acknowledge their sin and complete moral bankruptcy. The Father pleads with them, and this was not the first time. In the middle of this dark portrait we see a momentary glimpse of the Father who delights in keeping those in His loving care safe and secure. "For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs." (Zephaniah 3:17, NLT).

It is because of His love that the moment a person turns toward Him, they do not find an angry and stern taskmaster, but a forgiving Perfect Heavenly Father that takes delight in His children and calms and quiets all of their fears and anxieties. "God's love manifests itself in His Rejoicing over His saved people with joy and singing,

and resting in His love for them." (Torrey,1999, p.165).

No matter what the backdrop or scenario is and no matter how bleak the ill fated outcome appears, I make a choice to relate to my Perfect Heavenly Father as good and faithful. I continue to become convinced everyday that as long as I live in humility, brokenness, and repentance, I cannot fail and will not fall to far from the Perfect Heavenly Father and His firm grip. The only option is that every time I reach for my Perfect Heavenly Father, I receive His absolute best, because He is incapable of giving me anything less.

He can never give you second best. His nature will not let Him...Because His nature is love, I am always confident that however He expresses Himself to me is always best... Your trust in the love nature of God is crucial.²³

I live, move, and breathe from the position of continuing to understand my Perfect Heavenly Father's unconditional love as revealed through the scriptures each and everyday.

Unconditional love is never based on the performance or goodness of the person who is

²³ Henry Blackaby (1994) Experiencing God. Nashville: Broadman & Holman p.17.

receiving the love. It is based on the nature of the one who is giving it. There is nothing you can ever do to receive any more love than you have already received from the Father; He has proven His absolute and unconditional love for you by the selfless act of His Son, Jesus Christ, dying at Calvary... All you ever have to do is receive this love that the Father has for you. (Frost,2002,p.151).

Graham Cooke also shares with us His view of the Father.

In my own relationship with God, I have found Him to be a paradox-two apparently conflicting ideas contained in the same truth. He is the kindest and happiest Person I have ever met; a gentle father, always smiling, always gracious, always good and always restful. In His presence, there is joy and peace. At the same time, He is the most powerful Being in the universe-He is both the Prince of Peace (Isa.9:6) and a Man of War (Exodus 15:3). (Cooke,2003,2005,p.31).

Before we move on to look at the New Testament, I would like to look at one more area of the Old Testament

and at the man considered by the Father to be "a man after God's own heart". Of course, the man I am referring to is King David and the portion of scripture is the book of Psalms. In particular I would like to look at Psalm 100.

Shout with joy to the LORD, all the earth!

Worship the LORD with gladness.

Come before him, singing with joy.

Acknowledge that the LORD is God!

He made us, and we are his.

We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving;

go into his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him and praise his name.

For *the LORD is good* [italics added].

His unfailing love continues forever, [italics added] and *his faithfulness continues to each generation* [italics added]. (Psalms 100:1-5), NLT).

As I look at this Psalm, and I meditate on it one of the most profound things that I have realized is that if you were looking at this passage as a structure the foundation is the Perfect Heavenly Father's goodness, unfailing love, and faithfulness. What I mean is that this

passage is about giving thanks to God, however if our foundation is not in the goodness, faithfulness, and unfailing love of the Perfect Heavenly Father that becomes a truly difficult task.

Can our hearts be won by God's grace and kindness? It's an interesting question, isn't it? Too often, we close ourselves off from the goodness of God because we're so depressed about our own performance as a Christian. (Cooke, 2003, 2005, p.36).

A person that has not found their home in the Perfect Heavenly Father's heart will obviously find it difficult to rest in the fact that He is good, faithful, and His love is unfailing.

If he is not my father, he cannot become my father. A father is a father from the beginning. A primary relation cannot be superinduced. The consequence might be small where earthly fatherhood is concerned, but the very origin of my being - alas, if he be only a maker and not a father! Then am I only a machine, and not a child-not a man! If what you say is so, then it

is false to say I was created in his image!

(MacDonald,2005,pp.165-166).

My plea to the reader is to allow the absolute truth of His word's not mine to seep into your soul and saturate you with the reality of His goodness and mercy. As David said "Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever." (Psalm 23:6, NLT). "As a good heavenly Father, His very nature is to shower His goodness on us... Despite how things appear in this life, God's goodness toward us who love Him never changes."(Lawson,2000,p.150).

Throughout the O.T. the truth that God is love is evident in many places and one has to just open up their eyes to see this displayed time and time again.

God's love is immutable... His unchangeable character causes Him to remain constant in His love toward us, restraining His wrath even when we deserve to be consumed by it... Because God's love is immutable, it can neither increase nor Decrease. It certainly cannot grow stronger, because that would mean it is now less than perfect. Neither can it diminish, because that

would mean it would become less than perfect.
(Lawson, 2000, pp.131-132).

In speaking about the goodness of the Father Lawson makes the following point that I believe bears repeating.

As a loving Father, God Knows what we can handle without failing... Nothing comes into our lives that has not first passed through His hands... God's goodness is pictured as an unshakable refuge that protects us from harm when we run to Him with humble trust in our times of adversity.
(Lawson,2000,pp.146-147).

What my desire is as we close out this look at the O.T. is for the reader to realize that whether or not they are seeing the Father in the Old or the New He is Still the Perfect Heavenly Father and His invitation is that of a place of safety and security for those that choose to respond to Him and become sons and daughters.

God is our secret place, so hidden that the enemy can't even get into the neighborhood. God is generous, consistent, unchangeable, eternal, everlasting and always the same. He never gets disillusioned with us; He never had any illusions about us in the first place. He knew exactly what

He was taking on with us, and we can't surprise Him. He knows everything about us-He's seen the worst of us. In fact, the very moment we were at our worst was the day we realized He had chosen us and was calling us back to Him .(Cooke, 2003,2005,p.31-2).

Picture Perfect

As we begin our look at the New Testament it is important to recognize that Jesus was an exact representation of the Perfect Heavenly Father. His very goal was not only to die for our sins, but be a representation of the Perfect Heavenly Father's nature and character to the world. In Hebrews this is what was said: He [Jesus] reflects the glory [character] of God and bears the very stamp of his nature." (Hebrews 1:3a Revised Standard Version.).

"Jesus job description was to bring us to the Father, restoring our relationship of love and intimacy that went astray because of the fall." (Mumford, 2002,2006 p.17). To see Jesus is to see the Perfect Heavenly Father, that is an incredible truth that needs to be repeated over and over again.

For many years in my own life I saw Jesus as Savior

and His job was to save me from the Father God's wrath. This of course is not an accurate picture, but it drove me for many years of my life. Thank God, I now see things completely different and with an added dimension of His love, mercy, and grace. Instead of those attributes being an abstract idea written on paper, they have now become an awesome reality written on my heart.

Since the very beginning of time the Perfect Heavenly Father has desired that we come to know Him intimately and accurately and to assist us, He sent Jesus (God in the flesh) to walk on this earth. Mumford (2002,2006) reminds us that "Jesus was sent to reintroduce us to our loving heavenly Father... God's heart cry is that we know Him and open ourselves so that He can know us."(p.18).

He came to restore us to that place of knowing the Father in intimacy; The Garden of Eden is lost to humanity, at least until the return of the Lord. But the grace to know the Father has been restored by the cross. The cross itself is the very picture of the Father's love for us.

Jesus was sent to explain the Father and then ultimately to die on the cross as the full measure of the Father's heart.²⁴

As a person reads the N.T. and learns about the sacrifice of the Son the reality is that to see Jesus is to see the Perfect Heavenly Father. Regardless if you are reading a historical account or are pondering the parables each and every page is permeated with the Love of the Perfect Heavenly Father for His own children. With regards to the parables Manning has this insight. "The parables of Jesus reveal a God who is consistently overgenerous with His forgiveness and grace. He portrays God as the tender magnanimously canceling a debt, as the shepherd seeking a strayed sheep, as the judge hearing the prayer of the tax collector." (Manning,1986,2004,pp.21- 22).

Show Us the Father

In the book of John we see an incident that had incredible implications in helping the reader understand who the Father really is:

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would

²⁴ Marc Dupont. (1997,2004) Toxic Churches. Grand Rapids: Chosen Books. P. 73

know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him! "*Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."*

[Italics added] Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!* [Italics added] So why are you asking me to show him to you? (John:14:6-9,NLT).

Even for the disciples that walked and talked with Jesus for several years they had a difficult time in conceiving who the Father was. This did not erase the fact that their desire was to know the Father. Philip said "show us the Father, and we will be satisfied". Jesus was more than likely speaking to the whole group, and it was evidence that they needed an accurate picture of the Perfect Heavenly Father.

As with the original disciples each of us as disciples are in a necessary process of seeing an accurate picture of who the Perfect Heavenly Father really is and responding to Him in truth instead of a tragic lie.

For a disciple of Jesus the process of spiritual growth is a gradual repudiation of the unreal image God, an increasing openness to the true and

living God. In my own life, honoring the First Commandment, 'I am Yahweh your God: you shall have no gods except me,' has meant repudiating the god offend and wrath handed on to me by preachers, teachers and church authorities in my youth, repudiating the strange god who sees all non-Christians as good-for-nothings, who consigns all heathens to hell, who has given any one denomination a bonded franchise for salvation, who rubs his hands together with malicious glee and sends a Catholic to hell because he ate a hot dog on Friday, April 27, 1949. It has meant repudiating the strange god who flinches at gracing certain other churches with his presence; who despises a beleaguered couple who practice birth control; who forbids a divorcee the Eucharist; who ordains that some of his creatures (whether for race or creed or some other reason) shall be denied equal opportunity for employment and housing; who tells married Catholic priests that they are excommunicated and mature women that in America they can be vice president of the

country but in the church they must sit down,
submit and shut up. (Manning,1986,2204,pp.18-19).

By this point in our time together my hope and prayer is that the above is not the case for you. As a matter of fact the hope is that now you can see the Perfect Heavenly Father and not the fog of the enemies' lies.

Jesus said that He had declared the name of the Father to the disciples so that they might share in the love that exists between the Father and the Son. To declare the Father's name literally means to reveal His character. (McVey,1996, p.132).

The object is to allow each and every person that places their faith and trust in the Father through Jesus to be completely loved and free from judgment. Contrary to what some people think and preach Jesus Christ did not come to judge the world He came to save it (John 12:47).

The God of Jesus does not judge us, for He loves even those who are evil. In a word, the Father of Jesus loves sinners. He is the only God people have ever heard of who behaves this way. Unreal gods, the inventions of people, despise sinners. But the Father of Jesus loves all, no matter what

they do. And this, of course, is almost too incredible for us to accept.

(Manning,1986,2004,p.22).

Jesus Christ did not come to just save us and make us Heaven worthy. He came to enable us to have a direct relationship with the Perfect Heavenly Father. DuPont points out," Jesus did not come merely so that we could intellectually understand the truth. He came that we might experience, or have a living relationship, with the truth Himself." (2004,p.61).

This amazing truth is a hard one to grasp at times. We have been called into a relationship with truth. Just like Jesus each of us can live in an experiential relationship of intimacy with the Perfect Heavenly Father on a daily basis. This can be a personal relationship based on grace and mercy, not on duty and obligation.

This can be difficult to say the least to experience. Based on the concept we have of the Perfect Heavenly Father it will determine the depths of our relationship. The aim and the focus of our lives should be to walk with the Father like Jesus demonstrated daily.

It can be very difficult for us to conceptualize the bond of love that existed between Jesus and

the Father. We often do not see beyond the 'do's and don'ts,' the 'rights and wrongs' when we look at the life and words of Jesus, because we are preconditioned against unconditional love and acceptance. Jesus did not act out of fear of the Father's Wrath or displeasure, but out of His love for the Father and the desire to please Him in all things... Because He was one in essence with the Father's love, the essence of God permeated all of Jesus' being, thoughts and deeds. He knew fully where He had come from and where He was returning-the right hand of a loving Father.

(Dupont, 2004, pp. 73-74).

Many that struggle with this on a daily basis could benefit from understanding the perspective that Jesus walked in. He was so filled with the reality of the Perfect Heavenly Father's love and the Holy Spirit that the only desire that He had was to please His Father.

Every act and word that Jesus spoke was done so out of a full heart and a full Spirit. As a person chooses to live in the place of the Perfect Heavenly Father's heart, they too can experience this reality. Again, this points out the importance of knowing God as the Perfect Heavenly Father.

This is why we need to know our heavenly Father. He breathes very good stuff into his children. He resuscitates the lifeless soul. It creates within you a clean heart and renews a right spirit. He calls you 'saint.' He calls you 'beloved.' He says, 'You are of more value.' What a breath of fresh air!²⁵

When we see Jesus and the incredible love and intimate relationship that He had with His Father it is imperative that we understand that the Father wants to love us in the exact same way.

This unconditional, unending love is free, but it does not come without a considerable cost. For each of us the cost may be different; however for most it will cost our pride. The Perfect Heavenly Father pours out grace on the humble, but will resist the proud.

When I continue to walk in this reality of the Perfect Heavenly Father's love the most natural expression is His nature and Character lived through me.

Because God is love, because my spirit was created in His image and because God's love dwells inside of me, there is nothing more

²⁵ Johnny Parker (2003). Faith Like a Child. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell p. 38

natural on earth than for me to walk in expressed love, joy peace patience, kindness, goodness and gentleness (Gal. 5:22). (Frost,2002,p.193).

It is important to remember that each of us is in a process of becoming more like Him, but every single time that I look at the Jesus of the Bible, I am reminded that perfection is possible the more like Him, I become. The stark reality is that I may never experience this perfection this side of eternity, but it is my aim and goal to be an accurate representation of my Perfect Heavenly Father's nature and character to a hurting world.

Both Jesus Christ and his love-slave Paul represented God-as a Father perfect in love, Grand in self-forgetfulness, supreme in righteousness, devoted to the lives he has uttered. I will not believe less of the Father than I can conceive of glory after the lines he has given me, after the radiation of his glory in the face of his Son. He is the express image of the Father, by which we his imperfect images, are to read and understand him. Imperfect, we have yet perfection enough to discover our way toward the perfect. (MacDonald,2005,p.182).

These attributes that I desire to reflect are simply a replication of the nature and character of a Perfect Heavenly Father that was demonstrated to us by His son Jesus. Jesus told us over and over again that we are forgiven, free, and have the amazing ability to live a life full of unconditional love, mercy, and grace.

The incredible gift is that we because of the grace of God have the privilege of putting ourselves in this picture of perfect love. This is certainly not because we deserved it or earned it, but simply as a gift from our Perfect Heavenly Father.

I will close this section with the words of E.W. Kenyon.

Jesus said, 'I want you to settle down in my love just as I have settled down in my Father's love. I have remained in my Father's love. I want you to remain in my love.'... We are to settle down in that kingdom as permanent inhabitants, never to move out of the realm of love... Love becomes beautiful and very attractive as we continue to abide in love and let love abide in us.²⁶

²⁶ E.W. Kenyon. (1969). The New Kind of Love. Lynnwood: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society. Pp.16-17

The Photoshop Phenomenon

I am the first to admit that I am not much of a photographer. As a matter of fact if it was up to me our memories could be managed in a small shoe box.

However, I do understand that for those who are considered a photo enthusiast, there is a computer program that enables a person to "place" something in the picture that was not there originally. This program goes by the name Photoshop®.

The concept is, because of the marvels of modern technology, I can edit a photograph to include me in any situation. I see this reality of relationship with my Perfect Heavenly Father the very same way.

Jesus paved the way for each of us to walk into a relationship with the Father, and we had nothing to do with that fact. Even though the door has been opened, I still need to walk through into the hallway of His unfailing love. This requires me to not only receive forgiveness, but to release forgiveness as well. This can become very difficult if I still struggle with a shattered image of Father God.

No matter what the child may learn in Sunday school of a gentle and loving God who 'so loved

the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...'
(John 3:16), the heart has been scarred and
shaped by reactions to the earthly father, and
projects that onto God. Not until such people
forgive their natural fathers can they in fact
see God as Gentle and kind, lovingly present for
them. (Sandford,1982,p.29).

As we choose to walk in forgiveness we will begin to
gain or regain confidence in who the Father really is "when
we understand two things: who He is, and who we are."
(Cooke, 2003,2005,p.69).

This journey that we embark on entails us discarding
our damaged ideas and images of the Father.

Religion is a matter not of learning how to think
about God but of actually encountering Him.

Losing our illusions is painful because illusions
are the stuff we live by...God's love for us is so
great that He does not permit us to harbor false
images, no matter how attached we are to them.

God strips those falsehoods from us no matter how
naked it may make us, because it is better to
live naked in truth than clothed in fantasy.

(Manning,1986,2004,pp.17-18).

It is because the Perfect Heavenly Father is love that He will replace and restore our images of Him. This is all based on the truth that God is love. There is absolutely nothing we can do to change or cancel this reality.

God's love is based on nothing, and the fact that it is based on nothing makes us secure. Were it based on anything we do, and that 'anything' were to collapse, then God's love would crumble as well. But with the God of Jesus no such thing can possibly happen. People who realize this can live freely and to the full. Remember Atlas, who carries the whole world? We have Christian Atlases who mistakenly carry the burden of trying to deserve God's love. Even the mere watching of this lifestyle is depressing. I'd like to say to Atlas: 'Put that globe down and dance on it. That's why God made it.' And to these weary Christian Atlases: 'Lay down your load and build your life on God's love.' We don't have to earn this love; neither do we have to support it. It is a free gift. Jesus calls out: 'Come to Me, all you Atlases who are weary and find life

burdensome, and I will refresh you.' (Manning, 1986,2004,pp.22-23).

For many the idea that they have nothing to do with God loving them becomes very disturbing. Most people are convinced that there must be something they have to do. Most religious systems are based on this misinformation.

The unearned love of God can be disturbing. The idea of reward without work might put a brake on our dedication to the Gospel. I mean, why struggle to do good if God loves so recklessly and foolishly? It appears to be a sensible, valid question. (Manning,1986,2004,p.23).

This love that Manning refers to is what brings each individual safety, security, and significance. In this next quote Manning continues to describe the Father's love.

'The love God has for us' constitutes ultimate meaning and brings the peace and joy the world cannot give. To believe means to realize not just with the head but also with the heart that God loves me in a creative, intimate, unique, reliable, and tender way. Creative: out of His love I came forth; through His love I am who I am. Intimate: His love reaches out to the deepest

in me. Unique: His love embraces me as I am, not as I am considered to be by other people or supposed to be in my own self-image. Reliable: His love will never let me down. (Manning,1986, 2004,p.25).

The way that we are able to gain full access to this love is by simply placing our faith and trust in the finished work of the cross. When we accept Jesus, and what He did we are given an all access pass to the Perfect Heavenly Father's House.

God loves those who love His Son and believe that He came forth from the Father, because of their relationship to His Son, because they are united to Him by love and faith... God loves all men; but He has an altogether special love for those who are in Christ. God has precisely the same love for those who are in Christ Jesus that He has for Christ Jesus Himself.

(Torrey,1999,p.153).

This means that despite the facts of failures and faults a person needs only to reach out to the Perfect Heavenly Father, because He is good, and He is waiting for them.

God because of His love for us will forgive the

sins of any sinner, no matter how many and how great his sins may be, if he, on his part will turn away from his sins and turn to God. (Torrey, 1999,p.162).

This love for sinner and saint alike will never stop flowing from the Perfect Heavenly Fathers heart.

God's love is that it is eternal... it reaches back to eternity past and stretches forward to eternity future... God's love for us welled up before the creation of the world... Before God created heaven and earth, He loved us in Christ and set His heart upon us... God's love will endure throughout eternity future. Even in the ages to come, nothing will hinder the flow of God's perfect love toward us in Christ... God's love remains steadfast and stable forever... God's eternal love will never end but will triumphantly endure forever. God, and God alone, loves with such unfailing love.(Lawson, 2000,pp.130-131).

It is the Father Himself who draws each and everyone of us to His heart and His call is for us to rest in His love.

"That is, His love is perfectly satisfied, and He rests in a rapturous silence that is deeper than any words can express." (Torrey,1999,pp.165-166).

From the very beginning each of us was formed in the Perfect Heavenly Father's image and likeness and the moment we turn to Him He again breathes life into our Spirit.

We were created in the image of God, who is Himself a trinity... The body is our physical makeup...in which our spirit and soul dwell... The hard, outer shell is the soul and is what can be wounded and can bruise or wound others. But the inner core is the spirit of a man, where God desires to dwell and cultivate the fruit of His Spirit. At the point of salvation, God fills a person with His love and takes up residence within that person's spirit... Our spirits have become renewed in Christ, but outwardly our soul clothes the spirit and we must still address the pain and the wounds that remain in our outer shell-the mind, will, emotions and personality. (Frost,2002,p.191).

I would invite you to read about this subject further on my

website www.nolimitministries.com in the topical booklet "Emotional Healing".

It is in your Spirit that the Trinity takes up residence.

Your inner spirit man is the part of you that was made in the image of God, and it is where God dwells after you have been born again... created for love; its most natural state is found in being loved and loving others. There is nothing more natural than for your spirit to receive and give love. (Frost,2002,p.192).

As this happens a person is able to walk in a greater freedom than experienced previously. This is because the Perfect Heavenly Father's love is a tangible reality and not a token expression.

A deep sense of freedom comes with understanding the fact that we don't have to do anything to be loved by God. He loves us simply because it is His nature to love us. God is love. And as we become more like Him, it becomes our nature to love others. (Cooke,2003,2005,p.49).

It is when we come alive to this love that it becomes natural to release it to others around us. If we can stand

in front of the Perfect Heavenly Father forgiven then we can certainly stand in front of others and release forgiveness in their direction.

When we come alive to the love of God, depending on it for everything in our lives, the Holy Spirit turns all of our inadequacies and insecurities into joyful vulnerability...People hooked on the love of God can stand before Him with all of their flaws and imperfections and see what Christ sees. (Cooke, 2003, 2005, p.51).

The moment of salvation is the beginning not the pinnacle of a life spent searching and hoping for the truth. The reality that we are loved despite our damage is an amazing reality. The fact that I want to share this truth with anyone that I meet is another incredible overflow of experiencing His unfailing love. This love is not just a salve for salvation, but buckets and buckets of His glorious love poured over my head and reaching the depths of my heart.

He loves us exactly the same whether we are a saint or a sinner. What has changed is our ability to receive that love...I have increased

my capacity to receive that love. He has always loved me fully, every day. (Cooke,2003,2005, p.52).

This love never stops flowing toward humanity." God's love never ceases. It is a continuous flow from His being to ours. While we can take ourselves out of that flow of love, we can never stop it." (Cooke,2003,2005,p.53).

The Sin Issue

For anyone who has been a believer for more than five minutes sin is a real issue. The moment a person places their trust and faith in Jesus it does not guarantee them a life free from temptation and sin.

How a person views the Perfect Heavenly Father will have an affect on how they respond when they sin. How a person views the Father will determine what direction they run when they fail.

Holy Spirit will use conviction and not condemnation to bring us to an awareness of sin in our life.

When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, it's because He has the antidote in His hand. Conviction will never come without a gift, because 'every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of

lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning' (James 1:17). The Holy Spirit will not convict us unless He has something with which to replace our sin; otherwise we would withdraw and end up in enemy territory.(Cooke,2003, 2005,p.57).

It is the kindness of the Father that leads to repentance. Satan will use just the opposite "The Enemy accuses and abuses us to lead us into condemnation... But conviction is a friend because it leads us to the cross of Christ. (Cooke,2003,2005,p.57). The Perfect Heavenly Father is willing and waiting to forgive as soon as we turn toward home.

It is in our weakness that He is made strong. When a person is able to admit their weakness, it is then that forgiveness is able to flow freely in their direction. As has been said before there is not a single thing that can stop the Perfect Heavenly Father from loving us.

When we walk in this forgiveness and willingness to confess our sin and faults it then enables grace to rule our lives.

The reason we have been saved is so that we may know Him and His Father intimately...When grace

rules our lives we focus on Him. In doing so, we experience intimacy in such a way that service becomes a natural overflow of the love relationship we have with Him.²⁷

It is not up to us to save ourselves anymore than it is our responsibility to keep ourselves saved. It is only in the Perfect Heavenly Father's strength that we are able to live free from sin and its consequences.

The law of sin and death is always present, seeking to pull the Christian down into independent living at every moment, but there is another law in which the Christian may rest. It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. (McVey,1998,p.113).

It must be emphasized that this does not guarantee living a life outside of the influence of sin. It does, however mean that we can choose life instead of death.

The power of sin always resides within the Christian, the law of sin and death is not able to find its expression as long as the believer

²⁷ McVey, Steve (1998). Grace Rules. Eugene; Harvest House pp.12-13

rests in the sufficiency of Christ. At every moment that we depend totally on Him to express His life through us we will experience victory over sin... When a Christian abides in Christ, depending on Him as his life source at every moment, he will experience victory over sin. However, at any moment that a believer decides to function apart from Jesus, he will sin... There is no middle ground. Either a Christian chooses to depend entirely on Christ or else he doesn't. When our lifestyle is absorbed into our intimacy with Him, victory is the natural expression of His life within us. (McVey, 1998,pp.114-115).

The truth of this statement releases us to live a life that is focused on the Perfect Heavenly Father and not a person's failures. As McVey reminds us, we are not just spit-shined sinners we are saints (sons and daughters).

You are not just a sinner saved by grace. You are a saint who has the life of Christ at the center of your being. A sinner saved by grace spends his time on defensive against Satan. Someone who knows he is a saint goes on the offensive. (McVey, 1995,p.46).

The Believer is a saint with an impartation of righteousness from the Perfect Heavenly Father.

God only imputed righteousness to Old Testament saints, but He imparted righteousness to you when you were saved... Imparting righteousness is a literal event that happens to New Testament saints... You had righteousness created in you when you were saved... Your identity is determined by your birth, not your behavior. (McVey,1995,p.51).

Be All You Can Be

The life of a believer that is rooted and grounded in the love of the Perfect Heavenly Father becomes more about being than doing. What a believer then does (ministry to God and others) flows unrestrained from the reservoir of who they are.

He doesn't want what we can do-He just wants us! When Christ is allowed to express His life through us, it will be a ministry of supernatural life, not a religious routine which leaves us frustrated and unfulfilled. The core of the Christian life doesn't revolve around doing, but is grounded in being... Godly action is the

consequence of His life flowing from us. It is not the result of dedicated effort on our part. (McVey, 1996,pp.87-88).

What a believer does or doesn't in no way changes the Fact of the Perfect Heavenly Father's love.

There is nothing we can do that will cause God to love us more, nor is there anything we can do to prompt Him to love us less. Such constant love precludes self-Imposed, legalistic thinking whereby we would wrongly assume that any good works on our part could alter God's love for us. God wants a relationship with us, not a performance from us. He does not love us more when we please Him, nor does He love us less when we displease Him. Instead, with a constant, fixed love in Christ, He forever loves us the same yesterday, today, and forever.

(Lawson,2000,p.132).

The way that a believer continues to "be" is to rely on the instruction of Holy Spirit. The occupation of Holy Spirit today is to lead the believer to all truth and to continually reveal the nature and character of the Perfect Heavenly Father.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit today is to reveal God's nature, in order that we might enter into a Divine love relationship. If you feel weak in your love for your Heavenly Father ask the Holy Spirit to more Fully reveal Him to you each day through every circumstance that comes Into your life... He will make Himself known to you (McVey, 1995, pp.132-133).

Changing the View

As a believer comes to the realization that Holy Spirit enables them to cry out "Daddy God" it is at that point that a believer walks in the reality of being a son or daughter of their Perfect Heavenly Father. As a son or daughter the focus is not on reliance to the rules and regulations, but to radiate a reflection of the Perfect Heavenly Father to everyone in their path with passion.

If a person's view of the Perfect Heavenly Father is something less than that it is possible that they will have a hard time experiencing a relationship and worshipping Him the way he desires.

Our view of God has everything to do with how, or whether, we glorify Him with our lives. A diminished view of God demeans the worship we

give to Him. The Higher our view of God is, the greater our adoration for Him will be. Conversely the lower our view of God is, the lower our worship of Him will be. Our worship will rise no higher than our thoughts of Him. We are to worship Him in spirit and truth, most specifically the truth of who He is (Lawson, 2000,p.162).

As a believer with a right view of the Perfect Heavenly Father as seen in both the Old and the New Testament this does not erase the probability and possibility of struggles and suffering. The Perfect Heavenly Father does not promise to take us out or away from trials and temptations, but He promises that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). It is crucial to remember that as a believer lives their life in openness and intimacy with the Perfect Heavenly Father, quick to respond to His conviction, they are free from punishment.

God is not punishing us when things go wrong; troubles don't arise because He can't protect us. God will not reject us, even if we're not perfect. When we do well, God approves of us. When we do poorly, God accepts us. He is

compassionate either way. The love of God is never less than 100 percent; He just doesn't know how to be otherwise. He is unchanging and consistent. He takes joy in the fact that He is the Lord and that He never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever; we can be confident of who He is for us. (Cooke,2003,2005, p.35).

My hope is that as this chapter closes that anyone that is reading this has allowed the truth of God's word to penetrate their heart and mind. I encourage each and everyone to rediscover the amazing love story of the Perfect Heavenly Father for themselves as you read and re-read the Bible with fresh eyes and a full heart.

Chapter Four: Renewing the Mind

At this point I believe it becomes necessary to remind the reader of the aim and scope of this work. That is, to help each and every person recognize that their relationship or lack of relationship with their earthly father has directly affected the way that they see God.

When a person comes to the point of recognition and realization that residual pain from childhood cracks and crushes the lens that we later view life, other people, and more importantly God the Father that is when healing can take place.

When a believer chooses to walk in the light of the Perfect Heavenly Father's love instead of the darkness of the deceiver they are on the pathway of pursuing intimacy with the Father. This place of intimacy is only possible when we choose to live in the light of the Father where He constantly renews and restores us.

How a person sees God the Father will have a definite effect on every single area of life and also how a person sees themselves. Cooke (2003) shares this perspective:

What is your vision of God? How you see Him is how you see yourself. It determines how you view your life, your church, even the events that are

going on in the Body of Christ...The way we live is profoundly shaped by our image of God. Are you a sinner who struggles with the love of God, or are you a lover of God who occasionally struggles with sin? How do you see yourself? The more you have the wrong picture of God, the more religious and legalistic you may become. Modern Pharisees are people who do not know who God is for them. They don't understand the nature of God. They don't live in His compassion or mercy. They live by a rulebook, and they lose sight of what He is really like, much like the Pharisees in Jesus' time. They couldn't recognize who Jesus was, or His revelation of the Father. 'If you have seen me, you have seen the Father,' Jesus tried to explain. 'The Father and I are one and the same.' Even when He performed signs and wonders, a historic way of recognizing God, they couldn't figure it out. (Cooke,2003,2205, pp.32-33).

This chapter is about the very subject of renewing the mind so that a person begins to see the Perfect Heavenly Father as He really is and also can see themselves as a son

or daughter living in the Kingdom of their Perfect Heavenly Father's Love.

In order to build a foundation properly sometimes it becomes necessary to break up the one that was previously there. I am not a contractor, nor do I have a clue when it comes to the construction trade, but I do understand that it takes work to lay a foundation. Especially when there has already been a faulty foundation laid in the past.

Maybe what needs to be broken and reshaped is our image of who God wants to be for us. God loves us for who we are right now—the good, the bad and the ugly. And He also loves us for who we are going to be. Cooke, 2003, 2005, p.37).

When a person's image of God the Father is accurate it will lead them into a dynamic direction of experiencing intimacy, blessing, and their destiny of being a carrier of the Perfect Heavenly Father's love to their world.

The requirement is that each person has to be willing to lay aside their warped picture of the Father and allow him to paint a completely new portrait of the Perfect Heavenly Father that will allow a son or daughter to proceed with gladness to His heart.

It is always true to some extent that we make our

images of God. It is even truer that our image of God makes us. Eventually we become like the God we image...Healing our image of God heals our image of ourselves. (Manning,1986,2004,p.29).

In that pursuit of healing a person also begins to realize that there is a Father in Heaven that really loves them, and they are able to approach Him without fear simply because perfect love trumps fear every time.

What I would like to do now is to look at some of the areas in my life and the life of those who I have ministered too that tend to be areas that need to be renewed.

It is truth that leads to transformation and truth is not a word, but is a person. As a person reads and meditates on the truth then their life will be transformed into the image and likeness of the one that they passionately pursue.

Trust

The concept and the reality of trusting God are two completely different things. Seamands (1981, 2002), sums up what I am trying to communicate about the issue of trust in this lengthy, but an accurate quote:

Instead of trusting a God who is predictable in

His steadfastness and reliable in His faithfulness, many Christians are filled with fears and anxiety because at a deep gut-level they sense God to be untrustworthy. They sing about 'amazing grace,' talk about it in Sunday school, and even witness about it to others. But on a performance level, they live fearful of a God who accepts and loves them only when they 'measure up.' They quote verses about God always being with them, but ask me, 'Why is it that God never seems there when I need Him?' Their God is not, as Scripture puts it, 'the giver of every good and perfect gift' (James 1:17), or the One who desires to give good things to His children (Matthew 7:11). Rather, He is a killjoy who delights in taking from them whatever they really enjoy 'Why is it that God always seems to take from me everyone I've ever loved?' (pp.98-99).

I am reminded of a conversation that I had with a young lady several years ago about trust. She did not seem to have a problem trusting God for Salvation, but her question was "how can I trust Him with my heart?" and that seems to be the question for so many people.

That was exactly what the Holy Spirit showed me days before I had a tangible revelation of the Father's love. During a prayer time for pastors a man, whose name I don't even know, prayed for me in passing and said to me "God says you don't trust Him". Immediately I knew that this was true, I had no problem trusting Jesus for salvation, but to trust God with everything seemed virtually impossible. I know that I am not alone in that struggle.

In order to deal with this sense of rejection, shame, failure, and loss, I chose anger and superiority as a cover-up... I remember making a childhood vow to 'never ever trust another person as long as I live.'... Even after several decades of successful ministry, the consequences of my father's rejection were very much Alive... forced to recognize that I had deep, internal anger directed at no one in particular, accompanied by fear, more accurately free-floating anxiety-both without any obvious source or cause... These problems would always present a barrier to the intimacy with God for which my heart longed.

(Mumford (2002,2006,p.14)).

What I discovered with the help of Holy Spirit was that I had stopped trusting God the moment I stopped trusting people. The Father had never done anything personally too me; however the moment I closed my heart to my parents I also unknowingly closed my heart to my Perfect Heavenly Father.

The result was many years of struggle and strife that absolutely was not necessary. My hope is that anyone reading this does not have to walk the path that I did. These barriers are avoidable and unnecessary if a person will just open their heart to the Perfect Heavenly Father's love.

The barriers and roadblocks come when a person's view of God is off balance. "Misconceptions about God can certainly create a barrier in your relationship with him. And meanwhile, the friendship, love, and encouragement you could be sharing with your heavenly Father are never realized-all because of wrong conclusions about him." (Ingram,2004,p.20).

If a person will just pause for a moment and reflect on their life I challenge anyone to find a time in their life when the Perfect Heavenly Father failed them or

forsook them. I am confident that you will not find any single time that Father did anything but love each and everyone.

When a person is hesitant to surrender to the Perfect Heavenly Father and trust Him it is an indication that they are not rooted and grounded in love.

Afraid to surrender totally to the Lord because...such a statement indicates a lack of trust and understanding of the love of God... Never allow your heart to question the love of God. Settle it on the front end of your desiring to know Him and experience Him, that He loves you, (Blackaby,2004,p.18).

As a person lets down their walls of protection and allows the Perfect Heavenly Father's love to flow unrestrained and take a risk at knowing Him and being known they will start to become comfortable in the presence of the Father.

The Father is good, and it is impossible for Him to be anything else, because it would contradict His nature. When we allow the truth of this fact to saturate not only our minds, but to head to our hearts it will begin to affect our actions, decisions, and our relationships in a positive way.

It is the experience in the Perfect Heavenly Father's love that will open the door for a person to trust Him with all their heart. This is exactly what happened to Chip Ingram(2004) as he shares in his own words:

In that instant, realized in a fresh way that God is on my side... that he really delights in me. For the first time in a long while, I was able to separate my performance from what God thought of me. I was free to do what I could and to simply trust him for the rest. And it all started with that subtle change in my perception of God.

(Ingram,2004,p.25).

I can tell each and every person that is reading this, I know exactly how that feels and what that looks like. To be able to trust God the Father and realize that He is good and His plan is to prosper you and not to harm you at a heart level is one of the most freeing experiences in life.

To walk in the reality that you, and I were created for the express purpose of being in a trust based intimate relationship with the Perfect Heavenly Father is almost to good to be true.

God would cease to be God if He expressed Himself in any way other than perfect love! Your

relationship with God right now reveals what you believe about Him. It is spiritually impossible for you to believe one way and practice another. (Blackaby,2004,p.19).

If a person does struggle with trusting God then all they need to do is confess this to the Perfect Heavenly Father (who already knows) and to ask Father to reveal Himself to them. It is in these moments of experience that a person is fixed and founded in the inextinguishable love of the Father. When this happens it will be virtually impossible to say again "I can't trust God".

When you come to know God by experience, you will be convinced of His love. When you are convinced of His love, you can believe Him and trust Him. When you trust Him, you can obey Him. When you love Him, you have no problem obeying Him. (Blackaby,2004,p.20)

Another Quote from Blackaby:

God will begin to make Himself known to you very simply, as He would to a child. As you respond to Him in a simple childlike trust, you will find a whole new way of looking at life begin to unfold for you. (Blackaby,2004,p.25)

Each person has a right and a need for safety, security, and significance and if these things were not provided to them at a basic level they will continue to struggle until they acknowledge this fact and accept from the Perfect Heavenly Father that which they lack.

No matter how well your earthly father may have provided for you, even if you lived in a large home, wore the nicest clothing and ate the best food, if you didn't feel protected, comforted, or safe in his presence, you may never feel safe anywhere else in your life. (Frost,2002,p.92).

This issue of trust is so important because without trust you cannot have a relationship. That is why this issue of an incomplete or inaccurate picture of God becomes so vital to see victory in. Whether or not in the conscious mind or the subconscious until a person has a real experience in the Perfect Heavenly Father's amazing love it will be difficult to trust Him, let alone love Him in return with anything other than a loose application of a lackadaisical and apathetic love by the letter of the law.

We must mature past the question, 'Does God love me?' Of course, He loves us; it is immature to constantly demand that reassurance. Instead, we

need to believe who we are, and that God has outrageously provided for us. (Cooke, 2003, 2005, p.68).

When a person comes to a place of truly trusting the Perfect Heavenly Father and how he sees and relates to them that issue of "does He love me?" becomes settled in the heart of someone who is now a son or daughter and not just a slave.

A person who trusts the Perfect Heavenly Father completely and is walking in His love and grace will see a flow to their life that will make others take notice.

Every detail of life flows from his relationship with God. Grace means that God does it all. We simply receive from Him, cooperating with the Holy Spirit by trusting Him moment by moment... we act in confidence, resting in the fact that it is God who will initiate, perpetuate, and consummate His plan for our lives... One of the greatest joys in life is knowing that you are experiencing the very purpose for which you were created. (McVey, 1998, p.120).

It is from this position of trust that a person has now built the bridge to an intimate and growing relationship

with their Perfect Heavenly Father.

Intimacy

The problem with intimacy does not lie in the lap of the Father the problem is with me. How I think about Him and respond to Him determines my level of relationship." What you think about God shapes your whole relationship with him. In addition, what you believe God thinks about you determines how close you will grow toward him. (Ingram, 2004,p.20).

The very moment that we are given a renewed heart and enter into a relationship with God, we do have a degree of intimacy, but I would venture to say that it is far from what a person could experience. At best it is a collection of sparse and scattered moments of intimate contact more than a constant connection.

The problem is that the majority of people do not want to be known at a level that their hiccups and hang-ups are there in the open. Bob Mumford (2002,2006) calls it intimidation, "Most of us feel intimidated to show our real face or personality to anyone, let alone to God. Guilt, shame, and self-condemnation cause us to run, hide, and shift blame."(p.19).

Walking in an intimate relationship with the Perfect Heavenly Father is a process and not an event. It is not just about studying more, praying harder, and fasting more frequently. It is as simple as taking the time to know the Perfect Heavenly Father and learning to love Him for who He is and not for what He can do for me.

Every situation and circumstance in a person's life has a desired direction and that is that they would choose to walk in greater or fuller intimacy with the Father. Out of trials and catastrophes come opportunities to increase the capacity of a person to know the Perfect Heavenly Father and for the Father to really know them.

Many people are trying to accomplish what I would call forced intimacy and believe it is accomplished by "I will do this, and you will then do this for me". That is no less than a tit for a tat relationship and certainly is not what Jesus died for.

When a person's relationship with the Perfect Heavenly Father is at the surface level then the person feels as though they control the relationship and are able to build barricades and set up boundaries to determine just how far the Father can go in their life. This is really the design

of systematic religion to build walls to keep people from getting too close to God and to keep God far enough away from people.

The Perfect Heavenly Father wants to be free to flatten those walls and break those barricades in each person's life. The truth is, He already knows everything about everyone and that includes the deep and dark secrets of the heart.

The Father is not waiting for a person to become perfect, He just wants them to give Him permission to break down those walls. The truth is and remains that "God wants to see you move from knowing him dimly to knowing him vividly! He longs for distance to be transformed into intimacy. He already knows you intimately; he wants you to know him intimately too." (Ingram, 2004, p.44).

Each and everyday I need to remind myself that not only does my Perfect Heavenly Father love me, but He wants to know me and have me share everything with Him.

I have to consciously remind myself almost daily that God desires intimacy with me and wants to hear from me at every step-both high and low. I need to share all of life's moments with him, and

he will do great things in and through me.

(Parker, 2003, pp. 30-31).

One of the greatest ways that a person can communicate with the Perfect Heavenly Father is by praying. Prayer is two way communications from the heart of the person to the Heart of the Perfect Heavenly Father. How you view the Father is important even in relating to the subject of prayer.

What is your perception of God when you pray? Is He inclining His ear toward you, or do you feel as though you have to persuade Him, or trick Him, into listening? If your image of God is that He is interested and delighted in you, your whole prayer life and approach to will be changed. You'll love prayer! For many Christians, prayer is a chore, something we have to do in order to get our weekly allowance from God. Our view of Him is so skewed that we cannot come to Him properly. When distortions creep into our picture of God, the negative effects are felt in every part of our life. Those issues ripple through our relationships, values, ethics, integrity, love,

joy and peace. They affect our righteousness and purity. (Cooke, 2003, 2005, p. 34-35).

The position that every believer is postured in while praying is that of a highly favored child radically loved by their Perfect Heavenly Father.

God has put each of us into the one place where we are always favorable to Him-in Christ. Being in Christ is the only place where our prayers will be answered. It's the only place where we can be assured of receiving revelation. It's the only place where we can find every promise God has put on our lives. He has put us into Christ. We can never earn God's love; it's a perfect gift. But because the Father loves the Son, and because both dwell within us, we cannot avoid being loved by God. It doesn't matter if our day is good, bad or ugly: We are loved by Him. That's why we came to God in the first place. We were sinners, but He loved us. We are destined to experience that same love as saints. Hour after hour, day after day, year after year, His love comes down to us, touches us, and we return it to Him. Our job is to receive that love and give it

away as quickly as possible, knowing that it is going to come back to us deeper, bigger, wider and stronger... our number one priority should be to allow the love of God to touch us... our response to God's love should be to let Him lavish it upon us. We are to let Him speak to us, breathe on us and smile over us. (Cooke,2003, 2005,pp.46-47).

I don't know about you but after reading that I will never look at prayer the same way again. It is the Perfect Heavenly Father's delight to walk in intimacy with every individual that He calls son or daughter. I will gladly run to the secret place when I know that the Father just wants to know us and desires us to know and experience Him.

Identity

All of us were created to be a reflection of the Father's love, and God is at work transforming us into His image... When I came to truly believe that I was created in God's image-when I truly knew what His nature was like and that He was a loving Father and not an angry God-that is when I started becoming like Him. (Frost,2002,pp.194-195).

We must allow the love of God to work on our inadequacies, insecurities and fears. Love was made to conquer inadequacy. But in the light of the love of God in which we live, inadequacy doesn't matter. God can do anything and everything. He takes our inabilities and transforms them into actions. He deliberately chooses weak, foolish people whom the rest of the world ignores. God uses the imperfect perfectly. (Cooke, 2003, 2005, p. 48).

I wanted to start this section with those quotes because I believe that they say exactly what I am trying to communicate. When a person is walking in the foundation of the Father's love in intimate relationship, they began to really recognize their identity.

It is non-negotiable for a person who has placed their faith and trust in the Perfect Heavenly Father through Jesus to know who they really are. "Until a person knows who he is, his perception of himself will cause his behavior and identity to merge into one entity." (McVey, 1998, p. 109). This perception will not only affect the person, but everyone around them as well.

The goal is identity revelation and not just behavior

modification to become a "better behaved" Christian. When a believer comes alive to the truth of who they really are they become a danger to the devil and every demon from the depths of Hell.

When a believer begins to live in the reality of who they are in Christ, not even hell can stop them. When they become fully aware of their righteousness in Christ, temptation cannot destroy them, personal failure will no longer hijack their purpose and destiny, and condemnation will no longer hold them captive.

It is in the believers identity as a son or daughter of their Perfect Heavenly Father that authorizes them to live in this world, even as Jesus (our eldest brother) lived in this world. Every believer is a king-priest son or daughter anointed to rule and reign over the powers of darkness and to minister life and love to those around them.

The call is for a believer to "Open your eyes to the Wonder of who you are"! As a believer lives and moves and has their being in Jesus Christ, they are forever secure in their position as a son or daughter of the Perfect Heavenly Father founded and fixed in righteousness.

As stated earlier the key to living a life forgiven,

free, and full of life and love from the Perfect Heavenly Father is to focus on identity revelation. Every believer needs to renew their mind in the truth of who they are.

I want to share with the reader several scriptures and statements that will launch this process of recognizing your identity. The challenge is not only to memorize, but to meditate on these life-changing words and to let them sink deep into the heart.

- I have been created in the image of God. (Genesis 1:3).
- I have been transformed into the likeness of the Perfect Heavenly Father. (John 3:6).
- I have confidence that the Perfect Heavenly Father loves me and accepts me. (Ephesians 1:6).
- As a son or daughter of my Perfect Heavenly Father, I am pure from defilement of the world. (1 John 3:3).
- When I fail my Perfect Heavenly Father will not forsake or abandon me. (Hebrews 13:5).
- As I walk in fellowship with Holy Spirit, I am completely free from condemnation. (Romans 8:1).

- As I love my Perfect Heavenly Father and other people, I increase my capacity to feel loved. (1 John 4:12).
- As I love my Perfect Heavenly Father and others I am free from fear. (1 John 4:18).
- As the Perfect Heavenly Father's child, I am always welcome in His presence. (Hebrews 10:19)

Based upon what the truth of God's word says and regardless of how I feel or act. I am convinced of the following:

- My personal worth is based upon the price Jesus paid for my redemption, not upon my personal ability to perform correctly every time I am confronted with temptation.
- My Perfect Heavenly Father has a plan for my life that involves the fulfillment of my personal destiny.
- Even though I admit that I have faults and failures, I want to truly change. My Perfect Heavenly Father is working to change me one step at a time. Furthermore, while I am in the process of transformation I can still enjoy life.

- Because I am accepted by my Perfect Heavenly Father, I can accept others. As I sow seeds of unconditional acceptance, I will reap a harvest of unconditional acceptance.

As you take the time to renew your mind in the truth of His word "You will have 'aha' moments when God's Spirit helps you see yourself in ways that will forever change your life. This is a journey definitely worth taking." (Ingram,2004,p.51).

It is Holy Spirit that will lead the believer into the truth and pour out the Father's love into their hearts.

Holy Spirit has come to establish us in Christ. Conversely, the enemy has come to take us out of who are in Christ. The Holy Spirit wants to establish our standing. The enemy wants to bring us into the state of seeing ourselves as powerless, helpless and buried under pressure; but we must see ourselves as who we are in Jesus. The Holy Spirit is working to establish us in Christ, and we must learn how to abide there. We must not be moved. (Cooke,2003,2005,p.30).

The way that a believer is able to change their perspective is by the process of renewing the mind. Two areas that I believe are the most crucial is the identity of the believer and the assurance of the unconditional love of the Perfect Heavenly Father.

Our confidence and assurance about His love and our identity are not because of anything that we have done it is simply based upon the incredible grace that flows so freely from His throne.

Thanks to His grace, we can feel great about who we are, who we were and who we will become. God loves where we are going-and we should, too... We can love ourselves because God finds us incredibly lovable. (Cooke, 2003,2005,p.47).

As we prepare to now look at the process of renewing our minds in the 100% pure love of the Perfect Heavenly Father I would like to share this thought by Graham Cooke(2003,2005).

God loves us so much that He wants to give us more than we could ever expect to receive. But He will never give us anything just for ourselves-we are called to give it away, too. We must always

keep our eyes open for someone to whom we can give.(p.63).

100% Pure-Love

Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong [italics added]. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.(Ephesians 3:17b-19,NLT).

In order for a believer to live a life that is secure and significant, they must be fixed in the foundation of their Perfect Heavenly Father's love. Listen to what Mumford says his greatest need was:" What I needed was not just a personal revival, but a reformation based on an undiluted love for God." (P.56).

I want to make it crystal clear that it will not be accomplished by knowledge alone. A person can quote scripture after scripture, but without it saturating the soul you just memorized a good book.

Knowledge has its limitations, but love knows none. How that thrills the heart. When we realize this fact, life becomes such a big, real, rich romance. So every morning as you awaken, you may say, 'Today, I am walking in love. Today, I am fearless. I have God's ability. I have God's nature. I have His love-life.'

(Kenyon,1969,p.22).

This love that is mentioned is not the love that is thrown around with hooks on the end in society today. "Agape [God's love] is not dependent on us. We simply choose to accept God's love or resist it." (Mumford,2002, 2006 p.51).

The agape (100% pure love of God) is not a gift from the Father as Mumford (2002, 2006) tells us: "He does not give love as a gift; He gives Himself because He is the source of Agape [God's perfect love]...Holy Spirit is the manifestation of Agape proceeding from the Father and the Son." (p.49).

Whenever the topic of the Perfect Heavenly Father's unconditional love is mentioned someone inevitably makes

the comment "if the Father's love is unconditional won't people take it for granted?" Brennan Manning addresses that topic well.

Won't the awareness that God loves us no matter what lead to spiritual laziness and moral laxity? Theoretically, this seems a reasonable fear, but in reality the opposite is true. You know that your wife loves you as you are and not as you should be. Is this an invitation to infidelity, indifference, an 'anything goes' attitude? On the contrary, Love calls forth love. Doing your own thing in complete freedom means, in fact, responding to his love. The more rooted we are in the love of God the more generously we live our faith and practice it. (Manning, 1986, 2004, pp. 28-29).

Kenyon goes on further to explain that: "Love will redeem a wasted life and transform it into beauty and usefulness. Love is a spiritual thing. It is above reason. It is not in the reason realm. It is God, invading the realm of the human." (Kenyon, 1969, p. 11).

The rest of this section of renewing the mind will be focused on renewing the mind in the unconditional love of

the Perfect Heavenly Father. I would like to share, like in the previous section, scriptures and statements that can assist the reader in the renewing of their mind.

I would also like to point out that I have addressed this topic further in a topical paper titled the "Theology of a Renewed Mind" available for download on our website www.nolimitministries.com. Here is what Jack Frost (2002) has to say about the importance of a renewed mind.

Love should come naturally to us. We were created by God to love and to be loved. But because we were born into a sinful world, and because our sinful nature was bent toward believing the worst about God-rather than choosing to know Him as the loving Father that He is-we find that accepting His love and giving it away to others is a struggle even after we initially come to accept Christ's salvation. Our minds need to be renewed by the Holy Spirit. (Frost,2002,p.19).

Here are some statements with scripture references that can help in the process of renewing a believers mind as they passionately pursue all that Father has for them.

- My Perfect Heavenly Father loves me with an everlasting love. There has never been a moment when I have not been loved by Him. (Jeremiah 31:3).
- My Perfect Heavenly Father loves me so much that He gave His only son to die for me so I might know and experience His love. (John 3:16).
- My Perfect Heavenly Father loves me so much that He wants to express His love and affection to me. (John 16:27).
- There is nothing that can separate me from my Perfect Heavenly Father's love. (Romans 8:38-39).
- Even when I sin, my Perfect Heavenly Father loves me and asks me to sit beside Him with Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-6).
- My perfect Heavenly Father wants me to overflow with His love. (Ephesians 3:19).
- My Perfect Heavenly Father's thoughts towards me are always good and filled with hope. (Jeremiah 29:11).

- My Perfect Heavenly Father is so pleased with me being His child that He will meet all of my needs. (Luke 15:31).
- My Perfect Heavenly Father enjoys my company so much that He made His home with me. (John 14:23).
- My Perfect Heavenly Father is not ashamed of me. (Hebrews 11:16).
- My Perfect Heavenly Father has forgiven all of my iniquities and remembers my sins no more. (Jeremiah 31:34).
- Every single one of my sins is under His feet and cast into the depths of the ocean. (Micah 7:19).
- My Perfect Heavenly Father has redeemed me and forgiven all of my sins. (Colossians 1:13-14).
- My Perfect Heavenly Father not only forgives my sins, but He cleanses me from them. (1 John 1:9).
- I am my Perfect Heavenly Father's Child. (John 1:12-13).
- I am called a friend of Jesus. As a friend He has revealed everything to me that He learned from our Perfect Heavenly Father. (John 15:15).

- In my position of being in Christ it is like I have never sinned. (Romans 5:1).
- I Belong to my Perfect Heavenly Father. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
- I have been adopted by my Perfect Heavenly Father. (Ephesians 1:5).
- I am complete in Christ. (Colossians 2:10).
- I am walking in the reality that I am completely free from the cloud of condemnation. (Romans 8:1-2).
- My Perfect Heavenly Father is always for me, and never against me. (Romans 8:31).
- Even though I will face trials and troubles they cannot separate me from my Perfect Heavenly Father's love. (Romans 8:35).
- I am hidden with Christ in my Perfect Heavenly Father. (Colossians 3:3-4).
- I am filled with power, love, and a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7).
- I can always find grace and mercy when I am hurting or feel helpless. (Hebrews 4:16).

- My Perfect Heavenly Father's love casts out all fear. (1 John 4:18).
- While I am resting in my Perfect Heavenly Fathers arms the enemy has no right to touch me. (1 John 5:18).
- When I am afraid my Perfect Heavenly Father wants to hold and comfort me. (Isaiah 66:12-13).
- My Perfect Heavenly Father did not send His son to die for me so that I might be judged by Him. When I believe in Jesus, I am not judged. (John 3:17-18).
- My Perfect Heavenly Father does not judge me. (John 5:22).
- Jesus Christ came to earth to save me, not to judge me. (John 12:47).

Imagine what the church would look like if we would saturate our minds in these timeless truths. If the church would take the opportunity to meditate on the message in these scriptures until they walked completely convinced that the Perfect Heavenly Father loves them this world would never be the same again.

The part that each and every person can take is to renew their minds on a daily basis not out of duty but of delight in their Perfect Heavenly Father.

We can train ourselves so that at the first dawn consciousness in the morning, we will say, 'I have God inside of me today. It is going to be easy to do my work because the Greater One is going to move through me today, act through me, love through me, speak through me. I will not be left alone to meet any crisis. He will be there to make me a success.' (Kenyon,1969,p.22).

We will close this chapter with more words of Kenyon (1969), "Love will make you what your heart has craved. If you follow the Law of, Love, you cannot fail!" (p.28).

Chapter Five: Reformation that Restores

When people are able to see through us a Father who is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, merciful, truthful, faithful, and forgiving, their lives will change. This is and will be the source of society's renewal. (Mumford, 2002, 2006 p.27).

I would consider what Bob Mumford said about society being renewed by the Perfect Heavenly Father's love as the call of the decade if not the millennium. As we have looked at earlier this is the greatest need of our day. It is literally impossible to have a discussion with a group of people and not find someone who is not dealing with father issues that affect their lives on a daily basis.

Another voice in the overall church, Paul Cain, had this to say in the January 1990 issue of *Charisma* magazine. He was asked the question:

"What do you believe the decade of the 1990s holds for the church?" His answer: "I believe the church is about to experience a revelation of the Fatherhood of God. A new wave of evangelism will result as millions of prodigals will see the Father's love in the church again."... It is no

longer enough to just teach on the Father's love. We are living in an hour when we must begin to minister out of a deep personal experience we have had in the Father's affectionate love. (Frost,2002,foreword).

The key here is that we are not just talking about another teaching or trend, but as Mumford (2002,2006) says a: "gut-wrenching reformation, which begins in the basement of our souls and which rests upon a Kingdom understanding of Agape [God's unconditional love]." (p.69).

What I want to do in this final chapter is to look at what it looks like on an individual and a corporate church level as people respond to the incredible love of the Perfect Heavenly Father and live to give that love away. When the church becomes comfortable in love that is when the world will take notice and listen to what the church has to say. Until that point it will continue to be business as usual.

My hope and prayer is that the church would become comfortable in love and practice daily walking in intimacy with the Perfect Heavenly Father. In my opinion the following are principles that will transform the church

into a portrait of the Perfect Heavenly Father instead of a pack of prideful people that seem completely preoccupied with their own prejudices and preconceived notions.

Resting in Our Perfect Heavenly Father's Love

Every single day I am faced with a choice of walking in step with Holy Spirit or following the cadence of my carnal nature. That choice is not a one time event that extinguishes my bent for sin at salvation, but a moment by moment decision to follow the lead of my Perfect Heavenly Father.

When I choose life, I am provided the opportunity to live in a place of perfect peace. In this place as I rest in my Perfect Heavenly Father's love my heart and mind are controlled by peace. I can say from experience that it is the sweetest place this side of eternity.

In that place of peace I find it easy to be a representation of the nature and character of my Perfect Heavenly Father. This is exactly what He desires for my life.

God desires that we represent His name and reflect His glory to the world... We need simply to learn to love God... Eternal life is

when we know what the Father is really like, come to trust Him, and begin to respond to His love.

(Mumford,2002,2006 p.31).

When I stay in that position of peace as I rest in my Perfect Heavenly Father's love I am motivated like Jack Frost from the fact that I am deeply loved.

Most of the time I am motivated by a deep gratitude for being loved and accepted unconditionally by my Father. Ministry is simply an overflow of the love of God that flows freely through my marriage and family. As I receive His natural demonstration of affection for me, His precious phileo love, then I simply give it away to the next person I meet. (Frost,2002,p.14).

Please understand I am not talking about a happy clappy feel-good, fake it till ya make it feeling. This is a tangible touch of the peace and presence of God that trumps my trivial trials. It is about the believer positioning themselves in the place of rest whether it feels good or not.

Position yourself to enter into God's rest your spiritual man to rise above the outward man?
First of all agree with what the Word of God says

about you...outer man should never be judge of whether you feel close to God or not. God's truth, love and grace are the only factors of Proof of whether God is with you. (Frost,2002, p.201).

The truth is that every single believer has the unconditional love of their Perfect Heavenly Father dwelling in them. Each person that has placed their trust and faith in the Father through the Son has already received all the grace and mercy that is available from the reservoirs of Heaven. The fruit of a life lived in tandem with Holy Spirit are evident in a believer who is cradled in the bosom of their Perfect Heavenly Father. As Jack Frost continues to say:

The power of God that created the universe lives inside of me. His Spirit now lives in my spirit, and in Him there is no darkness at all. His love thinks no evil, and that love is resident in my spirit. Think about it; how can anything I do improve on that! (Frost,2002,p.196).

When a believer walks in the rest of their Perfect Heavenly Father how can it not make a difference? Each person that responds to and enters into this rest is a

living and breathing reservoir of the Perfect Heavenly Father's love. The reality remains that each believer was made in the image and likeness of the Perfect Heavenly Father and the goal is to hear the words "you are just like your father".

I was created in God's image and there is nothing more natural for me than intimacy and love... I am created by the Father of creation in His image created for God to flow through, created to do God things, created for love to flow freely through me. Every day I am being transformed a little more into a man who was created for the nations to experience God's love through me.

(Frost,2002,p.195)

I could literally go on and on because I believe that I have not mastered this reality, however I have gotten glimpses and glances of what this looks like as I walk in the incredible love of my Perfect Heavenly Father.

The magnificent love of the Perfect Heavenly Father is like a magnet that draws other people to a believer. When a believer walks in that perfect love it is impossible for them to fail. It is only when they take a step out of the

security of that rest that Satan is waiting to sabotage, steal, kill, and destroy.

If we had yielded to love, let it have dominion over us, the mistakes that have marred our lives would never have taken place. Love, in the final analysis, is wisdom. It has caused us to create, invent, and search until we have discovered things that will make others happy. Love will make us thoughtful, gentle, and tender. When we speak there will be something in our voices that will win people to us. We will not only be in earnest, but we will speak wisdom in love. When we love people, it is easy to work for them. If you are a preacher and want to be a success, love will be the key that opens the door to success. People will want you because you are a lover. They will come to hear you because everyone wishes to hear a lover. They will linger to talk with you because they want to be loved. So, 'abide ye in my love.' (Kenyon,1969,p.31).

Carriers of the Cure

He gives us His glory for the purpose of His character being formed in us as His people so

that a hurting world can see through us to the Father. (Mumford,2002,2006 p.29).

The destiny that each and every person is called to fulfill is to be a funnel of the Perfect Heavenly Father's love to the world. There are needs everywhere that there are people. What every person needs is the safety, security, and significance that the Perfect Heavenly Father makes available to each and everyone.

As a believer each person is the carrier of the cure for every human need. It is simply based on the fact that "God's love refuses to remain inactive in the presence of human need." (Mumford,2002,2006 p.31).

God's Agape [unconditional love] goes out to a hurting world without seeking return and comes to us from God, as a Father, without personal advantage or selfish gain. (Mumford,2002,2006 p.50).

One example of being a carrier of the cure into the chasm and crevices of a cracked and broken society is the story of XXXchurch.com. Pastor Craig Gross saw a need and decided to fill it with the Perfect Heavenly Father's love. In his book *Dirty Little Secret* he gives us a glimpse into

a world that most would never admit they know anything about.

A closer look into the scenes of porn star's life will show you a movie porn doesn't want you to see. The real truth is we porn actresses want to end the shame and trauma of our lives, but we can't do it alone. We need you men to fight for our freedom and give us back our honor. We need you to hold us in your strong arms while we sob tears over our deep wounds and begin to heal. We want you to throw out our movies and help piece together the shattered fragments of our lives. We need you to pray for us the next fifteen years so God will hear and repair our ruined lives."²⁸

What I find heartbreaking is what Gross has been told by every single porn star he has talked with "They're just looking for love." (2006, p.84).

Craig goes onto lay down an indictment on the institutional church that is critically accurate.

We own copies of the Prayer of Jabez, which sit neatly by our bedsides. We breed nice guys and gals who'd never be caught spooning or making out

²⁸ Craig Gross. (2006). The Dirty Little Secret. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. P. 84

in a parked car, let alone associating with porn stars. So many of us go through life without ever getting our hands dirty, waiting to cash in our tickets to heaven and collect our gold stars. The equipment Jesus gave us wasn't harps or clouds; he gave us shovels. Jesus loved the prostitutes and cripples of his day, and he loves the porn stars of today. Where we create stereotypes, Jesus created compassion. He embraces broken girls who've never known the love of a father.(Gross, 2006, pp.84-85).

The case could be made that all sexual sin is just a futile attempt at filling a real need with a false cure. I am absolutely convicted and catapulted into action as I read the following statement.

Most of Shelly's coworkers admit to experiencing sexual abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse, and neglect by parents. Some were raped by relatives and molested by neighbors. As Shelly puts it, 'When we were little girls, we wanted to play with dollies and be mommies, not have big scary men get on top of us. And we were taught at a young age that sex made us valuable. The same

horrible violations we experienced then, we
relive as we perform our tricks in front of the
camera. And we hate every minute of it. We are
traumatized little girls living on
antidepressants, drugs, and alcohol, acting out
our pain.' (Gross,2006,p.81).

The church must come down out of our ivory towers of
indifference and take off our black robes of self-
righteousness and reach out with the radical reforming love
of the Perfect Heavenly Father to a helpless and hurting
world around us.

What I find interesting is that the church shouts and
stamps their feet at the sins of the world, but refuses to
address their own dark places. The church has as many that
are in need of not more religion, but a reformation that
shakes their soul awake to the power and purpose of the
Perfect Heavenly Father's love, as are in the world.

So many are seeking love in all the wrong places.
Even if you fill a room with Spirit-filled-
believers, there will still be those Silent cries
being made all over the room: 'Somebody love me.'
'Somebody give me the love I need.' Somehow those
people end up attracted to

each other like magnets. Inside they are crying to be loved because the darkness in them stirs up the passions of the flesh. (Frost,2002,p.160).

The good news is that as a believer responds to the Perfect Heavenly Father's love, they become a safe place for others to find safety, security, and significance. The problem that is persistent in most places of worship is they are just not safe. The reason is that they are filled with insecure people that have never been able to rest in their Perfect Heavenly Father's love.

Enough about that what I want to focus on here is what it looks like when the church does walk in intimacy. Dupont,(2004), reminds us what intimacy looks like.

Intimacy with the Holy Spirit is where the ongoing revelation of God's heart flows. It is out of the, overflow of God's heart from our hearts that we grow to be as Jesus is: a lover of people, not only concerned about the big picture. (p.66).

As a pastor I am personally tired of the scripted Sundays that are filled with a few hymns for the ages and personal pep talks. What the church needs to be is a beacon

of hope and love to their hurting neighborhoods. Graham Cooke shares what I believe is the best description of church that I have read yet.

A church is a company of people who rise up in a community and occupy it on behalf of God... We are to be preoccupied by the needs of the community and realize that we are the windows God has opened through which He will pour His resources of heaven. We must stop living as if God is one step away from bankruptcy.

(Cooke,2003,2005,p.67).

This is what it looks like when the church is a carrier of the cure (The Perfect Heavenly Father's love) to the world. The church is called to be a carrier of the cure not a cement building that houses a group of people content with just surviving.

The church's job is too "give out whatever God gives me. The faster I can give it away, the better it is for me. I am called to be ridiculously generous-and so is every Christian on earth."(Cooke,2003,2005,p.66).

It is simply becoming experts at giving away the Father's love that will change the world.

We must practice and become brilliant at receiving the love of God. Jesus loves us-now we can love others. This is the true nature of Kingdom ministry: We receive the love of God and spread it to everyone we meet. (Cooke,2003, 2005,p.49).

The Father will never ask you to give something that He has not already given you. He equips believers physically, emotionally, and spiritually to bring the cure of the cancers of this world to each and every person. The church needs to simply wipe on the salve of the grace and mercy of the Father onto their eyes to see that they carry with them the unlimited resources of Heaven only to freely give them away.

God gives us more than we could ever handle for the specific purpose of giving it away to everyone we meet. No one in a city could escape the generosity of God if the church really woke up and saw what was available to them in Christ.(Cooke,2003,2005,p.58).

RX for Reformation

I would like to share in this last section what I believe are essential elements in seeing this reformation

continue to transform society. I believe it is a prescription right from the tablet of the Great physician to address every ache, pain, disease, and sickness in society resulting from an inaccurate image of the Perfect Heavenly Father.

One of the most influential people in my life and in the message of the Perfect Heavenly Father's love was Jack Frost, who recently went to be with our Perfect Heavenly Father, and he shared numerous times the "Ten Steps to Revival" that I would like to look at now.

1. You begin to become more and more sensitive to the small, daily sins that gradually steal your ability to walk in love, joy, peace and the sense of God's presence.
2. You begin to recognize that every misrepresentation of God's love to another individual is an area of sin and darkness in your life.
3. You start confessing your sin as soon as you recognize it instead of hiding it, justifying it or attempting to cover it up.
4. You experience forgiveness and cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ.

5. You feel clean and free and gratitude fills your heart for what God has done for you.
6. You experience an overwhelming sense of God's abiding presence, and you begin walking daily in the Spirit. You don't have to chase after a dramatic experience, for by faith, each day you have a sense that you are drawing nearer to the Father.
7. You become so full of God's love and the joy of His presence that you cannot wait to tell others. You become an honest, open, transparent witness for what God has done for you.
8. Through your transparent witnessing, others become convicted of their own sin and begin to desire an intimate relationship with God as well.
9. They confess their sins, repent and receive God's forgiveness and cleansing; they then become transparent witnesses themselves.
10. True revival is released within your family the church, the city, the nation and the world.
(Frost, 2002, pp. 185-186).

Like my friend Jack has said numerous times this is a process that is walked out on a daily basis. Here he

explains what that looks like.

Keys for me to process daily the Father's love... learning to recognize which voice I am listening to and choosing to follow today...It involves making a choice to walk in what God has created me to be and to be renewed daily by His love, or to walk in the identity of my outer man, which is an accumulation of ungodly beliefs and habit structures of thinking that I have formed from all of my life's experiences, betrayals, disappointments, rejections and self-love. (Frost,2002,p.194).

When a believer chooses to walk in this place of security you do not need to attend a revival service you become the revival which fuels reformation.

When we live in the place God has set aside for us, we are a revival. When we receive His gifts, we revive everything around us. When a revived person walks through the desert, they leave water in their footsteps... We are the revival for which we have prayed. God wants to give each of us more than we can cope with and enough for our whole community.(Cooke,2003,2005,p.65).

Each believer has a responsibility to be a reflection of the Perfect Heavenly Father. When that happens the implication and benefits are not only spiritual but the flow directly into society.

It is important to have fathers who function as good, loving fathers, not only because they are the ones who the natural plane affirm us as persons, but also because they are the ones who symbolize God the Father to us. (Payne,1989, 1995,p.134).

Each church should make their aim and goal not glitzy advertisements and slick services, but to become a reservoir of the Perfect Heavenly Father's love that reaches into society and as a result reforms and transforms the world one person at a time. When this happens it will truly transform our society, and we will see the impact and implications of a church walking in the security of the Perfect Heavenly Father's love for ages to come.

I will close with this statement. I am simply just a person that has been completely ruined for the ordinary by my Perfect Father's love. It is impossible for me to preach, teach, live, and love the way I use to. This is all the results of three simple words whispered by my Perfect

Heavenly Father into the soul of a struggling and insecure slave that longed to be a son. The words "I Love You" have rocked my soul and ripped through my self sufficiency and have allowed me to say without hesitation, "I Am Loved".

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