

# Who's Your Daddy?

1 John 3:1-3

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*Video and audio versions available online:*

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*This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!*

## Prayer

Jesus, I thank you that you do abide with me. You abide with us and now may we abide with you? Father, I pray that your truth —Jesus—would inhabit everything that we say. And that Lord God, you would give us the courage to believe what's true. This whole world would tell us something different, but I pray that we would hear your word and we pray that in Jesus's name. Amen.

## Message

Fred Craddock is one of my favorite preachers of all time. He used to tell about an encounter he had, one day, on vacation in Tennessee. The kids were at Grandma's. Fred and his wife were coming home through the Smoky Mountains and decided to stop at a favorite little café, the Blackberry Inn. - They didn't want to be bothered.

This old fellow walked into the café and started talking to everybody. Fred thought, "Oh, please let me just eat my pie in peace." But sure enough, the old guy meandered over to Fred's table.

He said, "You folks on vacation?"

Fred said, "Yes."

The old fellow asked, "You gonna be here long?"

Fred said, "No, not gonna be here long at all."

And then he asked, "What do ya do?"

Fred was waiting for this question. He had an answer that scared folks off: "Well, I'm professor of homiletics in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta."

The old guy lit up and said, "You're a preacher man! I've got a preacher story for you!"

Then he pulled up a chair and sat down at Fred's table and told a story.

"I was born back in these mountains. My mama wasn't married. The other women in town liked to spend time guessin' who my daddy was. And I didn't know who my daddy was. That was a real problem back then, different than now.

My mama worked a lot & the other kids weren't allowed to play with a boy like me. So, I'd hide in the weeds at recess, and I ate my lunch alone. They said I wasn't any good and I'd never amount to anything. The kids used to call me 'Ben the Bastard Boy, Ben the Bastard Boy.' I thought Bastard was my last name."

By this time, the old man had started to weep. He collected himself.

"I'm sorry," he said. "What I was meanin' to tell you was that there was this church in Laurel Springs that had a preacher with a voice big like God. I knew church wasn't a place for boys like me, but sometimes I'd sneak in and sit toward the back, fixin to sneak out as soon as the service was about to end. This one day that preacher went on, and oh, I just got lost in what he was sayin'. Before I knew it, church was over. The aisles got jammed up, folks were lookin' at me, I was makin' for the back door quick as I could when, all at once, I felt this big hand on my shoulder.

And I heard that voice, big like God: "Boy!" It was the preacher. He said, "Boy!" and I froze. He talked so loud everybody would hear. He said, "Boy, who's your daddy?" It was like a knife in my heart. Then, he said, "Boy, I know who your daddy is! Let's see now, why, you're a child of.... He paused, and it seemed like forever. It seemed like judgment day. "Boy, you're a child of, you're a child of God. And I say, I see a striking resemblance!" Then he swatted me on the bottom and said, "Now, you run along and go claim your inheritance."

The old guy looked up at Professor Craddock and said, "Professor, I was born that day." Then the old man got up and left. Immediately the waitress came scurrying over to the table. She asked, "What'd he say? What'd he say?" Craddock said, "Well, he told me a story, why do you ask?" The waitress looked at him a moment and said, "Don't you know who that is? Why, that's Ben Hooper—the illegitimate bastard boy elected twice the governor of Tennessee." Well, he couldn't have been that illegitimate if his daddy was God.

### **1John 3:1:**

**See [*idete*—behold, observe, consider, ponder, chew on this] what manner of love the Father has given to [lavished upon] us, that we should be called the children ["tekna," little children, kids] of God, and so we are [that's not just what we're called; it's what we really are].**

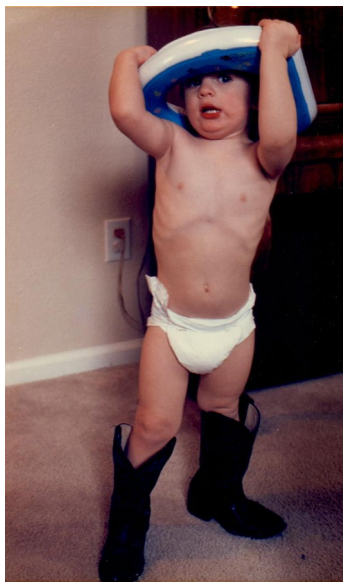
*Idete* is imperative tense. It means you'd better pay attention to this—you'd better consider it, you'd better ponder it, you'd better put it in your pipe and smoke it! Smoke what? The kind of love that God has for you. I tend to think the love of God is this ontological, philosophical, mandated necessity—God is Love so he has to love me; it's his duty. But John is saying, "Don't you see how He feels about you? The kind of love it is? Behold, it's daddy love!"

It appears that Jesus used the word "Abba" when speaking of His Father in heaven—that's an Aramaic word. The word shows up in the epistles because Paul seems to want to preserve it, like you need to get the point of this word. English translators seem afraid to translate it, yet the translation is fairly clear. The word 'Abba' means "Daddy." Da Da, Pa Pa, Abba Abba. It's a child's first word. And the father claims it as his own. "He said my name; I'm Daddy!" So, we're talking about daddy love.

In the Judaism of Jesus' day, to refer to God as your own father was scandalous, let alone to address Him as Abba—Daddy.<sup>i</sup> Well Jesus didn't just refer to God "Abba, Daddy" or "Father," for himself. He said, "Pray, 'Our Father.'" "Pray our Abba," as if, his Daddy were our Daddy. And he didn't say this to some group of super Christians. They were just a group of confused followers who followed him up on the side of a Hill. One of them was likely named Judas—Romans, gentiles, whoever happened to be there.

Jesus, from the bosom of the Father, Truth incarnate, who would never command a person to lie commanded them, and he commands you, saying, "Pray Our Father." Pray our Abba, our Daddy.

In John 17, Jesus says to the Father, "You loved them as you loved me." Did you get that? The way God feels about Jesus is the way he feels about you! "Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us." Now I've spent twenty years defending the theological veracity of the assertion that God is Love. But now John is saying, "Just stop, look, and say wow—that's incredible." "Behold what manner of Love, the Father has given unto us." So, let's behold it and just consider it a little bit.



This is a picture of my son Coleman. He thinks he's cool and important, wearing cowboy boots around the house. But in this picture, he's in a panic and distressed because he got his musical potty chair (that plays "Row, Row, Row Your Boat") stuck on his head, and he can't get it off his head. And worse still, his dad's not helping; he's just taking a picture.

I have this picture framed and hanging in my office by the door. You know, I think I am important, and many times leave my office terribly distressed and in a panic. This picture is to remind me of who I really am, a little child of God with a potty chair stuck on my head. God knows me as I truly am, and He likes me. I'm important to him. I really, really like my son Coleman. That's how I feel about him.

However, if you stood in my living room in a diaper, and cowboy boots, with a toilet seat stuck on your head, I wouldn't feel the same way about you. You're not my child. You're God's child; that's how He feels about you. But you're not my child, and I'm not your daddy. You see, daddy love is unique, different from other kinds of love. It's unearned. You can't earn it. A baby can't do anything to earn love. They suck (suckle) and poop, and that's about it. But daddies and mommies die for babies. That shocked me as a new dad, this new kind of love. They didn't earn it, and I didn't earn it. It just showed up in me and not to my credit.

Almost every night, when my children were little, I'd sneak into their rooms and just watch them sleep, captivated by the sheer wonder of their mere existence. I remember thinking over and over, "How could I ever not love you?" Then, they became teenagers and now they're young adults they were just all home for Christmas. They have conditions, successes, failures, good days, bad days but all I have to do is remember: "They are still, at least, that baby—that miracle." And then, they're more than easy to love.

So good daddy love is unconditional. You can make God glad, sad, and angry but you can't make God love you any more or any less than He does right now. So good daddy love is unique, unearned, unconditional, and intensely passionate.

One day when Elizabeth was about three, I took her to the park. She'd stand on top of the slide and say, "See? I do it! See?" Then, she'd slide down the slide. I'd say, "Oh, yes, that's awesome!" And it was awesome. Well, after a while I went and sat down and just watched, amazed at the sheer wonder of her mere existence. And then, this woman and her daughter came along and started using the slide as well. This mother would watch her little girl saying, "Great job!" and praising her as she came down the slide. But she didn't notice Elizabeth. After a time, Elizabeth stood at the top of the slide and said, "See me, see me, I do it, I do it!" And this lady didn't even notice.

We're each so much like Elizabeth. We say to the world, "See me, see me, see me!" and the world ignores us or says, "Yeah, so what?" But not the Father, he sees. Well, finally Elizabeth was just yelling at this lady. "See me! See me! I do it!" But this lady wouldn't even look at my daughter. I'm watching this and growing furious: I remember fantasizing about picking up a board and smacking this lady in the head and screaming, "Look at my daughter; she's the greatest slide slider this world has ever seen!"

People say they don't understand the wrath of God. I think dads do. Every good daddy does. It's the fluid that love bleeds, the burning edge of love. I was burning with wrath and just about to go over there, judge her, condemn her and whack her in the head, when I sensed God's whisper in my heart:

Hey, Peter, what if that lady at the foot of the slide is my little girl, just like Elizabeth is your little girl? What if every child starving in Africa is my child? What if every kid living in the dump in Tijuana is my kid too? They cry, "See me! See me! Feed me! Feed me!" and you don't even look. You should drop to your knees in gratitude that I have turned my white-hot wrath upon myself instead of you. For you see, Peter, my son, I love you in this way too.

What if God loves everyone in the world the way I love Elizabeth? And yet everyone in the world refuses to see each other? What does the good Father do with His wrath? He issues judgment and then he bears his own judgement within himself until all his children see his judgement and learn to love as he loves. What if God loves me the way that I love my daughter? But I don't see me; perhaps I hate me. Perhaps I'm my own worst enemy? Wouldn't God's wrath burn towards me, precisely because he loves me? Perhaps he destroys the false me for the love of the true me, to liberate me? That's what Paul is working toward in Romans. We'll start reading about it in chapter five.

Well, daddy love is unique, unearned, unconditional, intense, and sacrificial. So, God's love makes Him vulnerable to you. I'm most vulnerable to the people I love. Who can hurt me most? Jonathan, Elizabeth, Becky, Coleman, and my bride. Who can hurt God most? You. It wasn't nails that held Jesus to that wood [on the cross]. It was Love for you.

Daddy love is vulnerable, and it never comes to an end. Wrath comes to an end. Revelation 15:1: "With this, the wrath of God is ended." But "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, and his mercies never come to an end." It may seem like the mercies do come to an end, but that's because good daddies are willing to discipline, even very severely. Yet all the discipline is love.

When my son Jon was about four, a man came over to fix the furnace. We went downstairs. Jon watched as he adjusted the burner, then Jon turned to me in obvious distress and said, "What's that?" I said, "Well, those flames heat the water in our house." (Actually, it was the furnace, not the water heater, but that's what I said.) Over the next few days, we noticed that Jon started having accidents - wetting his pants and dirtying his underwear. And then he refused to take a bath. When we inquired as to why, he told us, "The flames will come up and burn me!"

I tried explaining to Jon that the flames couldn't come through the water pipes. Grandma even came over and put her hand in the toilet but it didn't do any good. Terror had imprisoned my son in a lie. Finally, Susan and I sat down, had a conversation, and issued judgment. That night when I could tell he was loaded, I took him by the hand, screaming and crying, and I held him to toilet seat. Few times in my life have I encountered such terror in a person. But I held him there, until the deed was done.

God can teach you things in the strangest places. Scripture says, "God disciplines those He loves." So He will literally hold us to the fire, and burn us, "right down to faith." (Barth) Scripture says our faith is tested like gold refined by fire. Do you understand? I held Jon to that toilet because I loved him. I wanted him to share my joy: a social life, friends, clean underwear.

Jon is thirty-three now, he was home this last week and I want to tell you that perfect love has cast out fear. He will sit on the toilet for hours without fear now. But now imagine if during that time while I was disciplining Jon—holding him to that "flaming toilet of death"—someone counseled Jon during that time. Imagine if they said:

"Jon, you'd better fear your daddy, because he will not let you live in your own filth. As long as you keep pooing your pants, your dad will come hold you to the toilet. You can't escape his discipline or hide from his judgment. If you're 60 years old, hiding in a cave in Alaska but still

pooing your pants, your 87-year-old daddy will hunt you down, find a toilet, and hold you to it! Fear him because he loves you, and his love will not stop.”

Well, that would have been weird, but good counsel. But now imagine if someone else came along and whispered this in my son’s ear:

“Jonathan, you’d better fear your daddy because one day his love will stop. His patience will run out, and then he’ll punish you. He will torment and torture you forever without end. And if you cry out for mercy, there will be no mercy. It’s too late. His mercy has come to an end.”

Well, if someone whispered that in my son’s ear, my son might obey me; he’d “honor me with his lips, but his heart would be far, far from me.” It’s hard to think of anything that would be more damaging to my son’s faith in me than that or anything that would get me more angry than someone saying stuff like that to my kid. And yet we say stuff like that to God’s kids, don’t we? But if God’s love is daddy love, we ought to think twice about statements like that. Good Daddy’s will discipline, very severely at times, but they have no interest in endlessly torturing their own children.

Scripture clearly states that God’s wrath comes to an end. But the steadfast love of the Lord never ends. It is the End. Jesus is the End. Good daddy love is relentless, empathetic, and compassionate. When Coleman was little, we’d punish him by making him sit on the green couch. Sometimes he’d do something bad and just go sit on the green couch on his own. I’d find him there and say, “Coleman, what did you do?” And he’d confess. Well, Coleman spent a lot of time on the green couch, and I spent a lot of time on the green couch with him. I’d go there just to be with him. “The day you eat of it, you will surely die,” says God the Father. And then in Jesus, He chooses to die with us and even descend into Hades, just to be with us.

*Hades* is a lot like being sentenced to time alone on the green couch (time out). That’s one of the words that often gets translated “hell” in the Old Testament. There’s another word that often gets translated as “hell” too, and that’s *Gehenna*—and that’s the presence of the fire. *Gehenna* is a lot like my presence next to Coleman on the green couch. Love can burn a self-righteous little ego, but it’s pleased to do so for the sake of reaches a child’s heart.

Good daddy love is unique, unearned, unconditional, intensely passionate, sacrificial, relentless, empathetic, and compassionate. It seeks the heart. Good daddy love desires faith and that’s what Romans is all about, up to this point. God desires faith.

One day many years ago, I was driving up our street. The kids were in their car seats in the back, and my wife next to me in the front. And I just had to spit, sorry, that’s just the way it is with guys sometimes. I rolled down my window, collected my mucus and let it fly. Within a second, I heard all this spitting in the back seat—the kids couldn’t get there windows down and so they were just spitting all over the windows.

My wife didn’t think it was very funny, she gave me the look, but I wasn’t ashamed or angry. I wasn’t disappointed. I was proud. My kids trusted me and wanted to be like me. We’d have to work on their spitting skills. But I already had everything I wanted. I had their faith.

Daddy love desires faith, and faith is “reckoned as righteousness.” Faith is rightness. Anything done in faith for your Father is beautiful in his eyes; it’s good. So, your Heavenly Father delights in the scribbles you call art. Even though He made the Grand Canyon, He puts your drawing on His refrigerator. Although He can listen to countless choirs of angels, He listens to you. And He doesn’t notice you’re off-key. You’re His kid. You’re His priority.

I grew up in a busy church with a busy and important pastor. He didn’t have enough time for everyone’s needs, but any time I had a need, he’d drop everything just for me. I had the key to his office; I’d go in whenever I chose; I had the pastor wrapped around my little finger. Why? Because I was the best parishioner? No! I was the worst. I made the Sunday School teacher quit. My initials were carved in the pew in the balcony. It wasn’t because I was the best parishioner; it was because the pastor was my dad.

See? To my dad, I was more important than his reputation. I was more important than any institution, including the church, or maybe I should say I was church—I was his church. His priority. And you are God’s priority. He watches you when you sleep. Your picture is in His wallet. Your arts and crafts adorn his desk. He dreams your dreams, laughs at your stupid jokes, and he cries your tears. And you are more important than his reputation. And so, he emptied himself, took the form of a slave, made himself of no reputation, and humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross.

I remember lying in a hospital bed in fourth grade, recovering from extensive knee surgery. It was the worst pain I have ever endured. My father leaned over the side of the bed, and with the most intense, compassionate, and serious countenance he said, “Oh, Peter, I wish there was some way I could take your place.” I remember looking back at my father and thinking: “You’re nuts! What on earth could possess a person to will such a thing?” Now I know. Daddy love.

Well, your heavenly Father not only wills such a thing. In Christ Jesus he did such a thing. He suffers every pain you suffer; weeps every tear you cry. Is He crazy? Yes! He’s crazy with love for you. Daddy love is unique, unearned, unconditional, intensely passionate, sacrificial, vulnerable, relentless, and it seeks the heart. It endures all things. The good daddy “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.” John says, “Behold, what manner of love the Father has given to us!” And what does the Father want from us? Just that—to look, to behold, to ingest even.

Years ago, Elizabeth was having a no good very bad day. She was mean to everyone, and lectures, threats and spankings weren’t doing any good. That night I said, “Let’s all go out to dinner.” In the van on the way there, she was picking fights with her brothers and her sister and just plain mean. After I parked the van I said, “Everybody inside, except you Elizabeth. You’re staying here with me.”

I sat her in the front seat, stared her down and she stared back at me. I said, “Elizabeth, what’s gotten into you?” She said, “Well, I know, but I’m not telling you.” I didn’t know what to do at that point. So finally, I just made her come sit on my lap. I could tell that my touch burned. Saint Paul wrote, “It’s his kindness that leads to repentance.” My kindness burned the wounded ego in

which she was trapped—her five-year old pride. I just held her, for a long time and finally she cracked. “Do you remember when you came to my kindergarten class?” she asked.

I said, “Yeah,”

“Do you remember Kelly?”

I said, “Yeah.” (She was this little girl that had just glommed onto me.)

“Well, Daddy, Kelly said that you said, you didn’t love me anymore, you loved her!!”

Then Elizabeth just fell apart in a fountain of tears.

I said, “Elizabeth, does Kelly have a Daddy?”

“Yes,” she answered, “but he just moved away from Kelly and her Mommy.”

“Elizabeth, look at me,” I said. “I will always love you, that will not change. Please don’t doubt my love for you, for when you do, it hurts me. And when you do doubt, please come tell me, so I can tell you again, ‘I love you!’”

What’s gotten into you? Answer: A lie from hell that creates hell. The Enemy Whispers, “The Father doesn’t love you. His mercies have come to an end, that was one to many times.” I call that “Satan’s Big Butt.”

The Church preaches the Gospel, which in a word is Jesus, which means “God is Salvation;” The Church preaches, God is your Father, Your Father loves you, and Your Father saves you.

And Satan whispers, “But Hell,” “But God tortures some people endlessly. He’s got them in the basement right now and it’s too late, he will not change his mind. You can’t trust him.” Satan has been whispering “But Hell,” even through the Church, particularly since about 350AD.

I think that we’re called to expose his big “but”, but first, we need to make sure it’s not our big “but.” See the essence of all Spiritual Warfare is beholding the Love that God has for us in Christ Jesus. It’s not an option—I guess that’s the thing that keeps getting pounded into my head. It’s not an option; it’s an imperative—you must. You must renounce the lie that God the Father doesn’t love you, or that He’s not powerful enough to save you. Renounce it and take time every day to simply behold your Father’s love for you. Take time, to lay down your gadgets and toys and just sit on his lap., in his presence. Not praying through a list, Not making resolutions, Not promising anything, Not intending anything but just considering, enjoying, abiding in the fact that your Daddy is completely, furiously, passionately in love with you right now, right here, as you are, without accomplishing a thing.

If you want to have to achieve something, if you want to have to strive for something, if you want to have to earn something, you’ve missed it and you’re not beholding it. You cannot do anything to earn it, but if you behold it, it will do all sorts of things to you, in you and through you. It will transform you. The Love of the Father creates us in His own image. I think that’s what we’ll discover by the end of the book of Romans.

**1 John 3:1, 3:**

**[Behold] See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are...<sup>3</sup>And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.**



Paul puts it this way “Be imitators of God as beloved children.” Believe you are a beloved child, and you will imitate God, whether or not you consciously choose to do so, or not. You’ll just spit all over the window on the inside of the car. Sometimes people ask me, “Why are you a pastor?” I know part of the answer is I think God tricked me into it. But maybe the most important answer is that I’m imitating my dad. And I’m imitating my dad, because I beheld the Love of God my father, in my dad, and I couldn’t explain it by this world. Daddy love validates us, creates us, and shapes us in its own image. Daddy love is incredibly powerful stuff. Psychologists say that parents (particularly fathers) shape our view of reality, and how we relate to reality. So much so that by the age of three, your view of reality is set. You can’t help it and to unlearn it, you’d have to be, like, born again.

And so, for some, reality has been awfully bleak. For some, this sermon has been incredibly painful. For some, your story is not like mine, but more like Ben Hooper’s. Perhaps your father made you hate yourself. Perhaps your father betrayed, molested, or abused you. And now the horror of it all is that you look in the mirror and see your father.

I once heard my aunt tell about a man she knew, born in 1919. He grew up in the Depression... in a family of 13 children. His father failed at two or three businesses, turned to alcohol, and became abusive. One night, the boy awoke out of a sound sleep to the sound of screaming. He ran downstairs to see his father, drunk and waving a rifle around the kitchen. His mother was hanging onto the stock of the rifle screaming, “No! Stop! Don’t do it,” while his father yelled, “I’m gonna kill ‘em! I’m gonna kill em ! I’m gonna kill all of them sons of bitches!”

It only stopped because the boy’s brother ran barefoot through the frozen fields of Nebraska to the neighbor’s house and called the police. The police came and took his daddy away. Now, psychologists would tell you that that boy would very likely grow up to be just like his father: abusive, cruel, and limited in his ability to love. But that boy was the most compassionate, loving and kind man I’ve ever known. That boy was my daddy. I heard those stories from my aunt, cause my Dad wouldn’t tell them. It was like he had forgiven and forgotten, and he would only speak well of his dad.

I’d hear her talk, and I’d be shocked at who my Daddy was. He was remarkably different than my relatives. So what happened to my dad?

- The same thing that happened to Ben Hooper.
- The same thing that happened to Paul, “chief of sinners.”
- The same thing that happened to John, Son of Thunder.

By the power of Jesus, when he was 19 years old, living here in Denver before World War II, my daddy met his true Father. He heard the judgment; he heard the Word; he heard the preacher say, “Boy, I know who your daddy is. Your daddy is God.” My father believed that judgment and claimed that inheritance. So what’s this about [moves to communion table]? Well, this is your inheritance.

## Communion

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus—the only begotten son of God, took bread and broke it saying this is my body given to you, take and eat. And in the same manner he took the cup saying this is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. They all knew “the life is in the blood,” Christ’s life, Christ’s Spirit is in the blood. So when you come to this table, you understand that you are drinking Jesus’s life into yourself. In Romans chapter three we read that Jesus is the propitiation and we’re justified by faith in his blood—as if faith is really in his blood, as if the Spirit is really in his blood.

And then, in Romans eight Paul says this:

**Romans 8:15 (RSV):**

**For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God, and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”**

So, when you say “Abba! Father,” that’s not just you saying it. That’s the only begotten son of God, descended into your heart, saying it with you and reminding you “Hey, the way Dad feels about me is the way he feels about you.” So, in Jesus’s name, come to the table and claim your inheritance. Amen.

## Benediction

Close your eyes. Jesus said you must become like little children to enter the kingdom. Imagine yourself five-years-old—scared and standing in the darkness alone. In your arms are all your toys (possessions, accomplishments, addictions, judgments, unforgiveness, fears, failures, guilt). You hold them as security against the darkness—things that you think you’ve achieved, ways you punish yourself in the hope of not being punished. You think they tell you who you are.

Now listen: “I know who your daddy is. Your Daddy is God.” Two hands now reach down out of the darkness. There are nail prints in the hands. You drop your toys—those things that you hang onto so tightly. Imagine him picking you up holding you in his lap and holding you in his arms.

- Don’t promise anything.
- Don’t vow anything.
- Don’t hide anything.
- Don’t say anything...just sit there.

Just stay there and behold His love and now say “Abba.” Now, I’m not going to swat you on the bottom because I would get in trouble for that. But, if I could, I would swat you on the bottom and say now, 2022, you run along and go claim your inheritance. In Jesus’s name, believe the Gospel. Amen.

## Endnotes

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Jewish prayers on the one hand do not contain a single example of *abba* as an address for God; Jesus on the other hand always used it when he prayed (with the exception of the cry from the cross, Mark 15:34). This means that we here have an unequivocal characteristic of the unique way in which Jesus expressed himself, of his *ipissima vox*.

The reason why Jewish prayers do not address God as *Abba* is disclosed when one considers the linguistic background of the word. Originally, *abba* was a babbling sound. The Talmud says: "When a child experiences the taste of wheat (that is, when it is weaned) it learns to say *abba* and *imma*" (that is, Dada and Mama are the first words which it utters); and the church fathers Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Theodoret of Cyrus, all three of them born in Antioch of well-to-do parents, but in all probability raised by Syrian nurses, tell us out of their own experience that little children used to call their fathers *abba*. . . . Grown-up sons and daughters called their fathers *abba* as well (cp. Luke 15.21), and only on formal occasions resorted to "Sir" (Kyrie) (cp. Matt. 21.29 [30]). But in spite of this development the origin of the word in the language of infants never falls into oblivion.

We are now in a position to say why *abba* is not used in Jewish prayers as an address to God: to a Jewish mind, it would have been irreverent and therefore unthinkable to call God by this familiar word. . . . *Abba*, then, is a word which conveys revelation. It represents the centre of Jesus' awareness of his mission. . . . He gives them this address [The Lord's Prayer] as the token of their discipleship. By the authorization that they, too, may invoke God as *Abba*, he lets them participate in his own communion with God. He even goes as far as to say that only he who can repeat this childlike *Abba* shall enter into the kingdom of God. This address, *Abba*, when spoken by the disciples, is a sharing in the revelation, it is actualized eschatology. It is the presence of the kingdom even here, even now. It is a fulfillment, granted in advance, of the promise:

*I shall be their father and they my children.*

*They all shall be called children of  
the living God.* (Jubilees 1.24f.)

~ Joachim Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, pp. 20, 21, 27, 28-29