

A Journey of Reconciliation

One of my dad's favorite verses was 1 Corinthians 15:19: "If in this life only we have hope in Messiah, we are of all men most miserable."

The day before dad passed, I was standing in my closet, looking for a shirt to wear. I moved the shirts over to pick one out, and my eyes caught the front of a white t-shirt that my sister Deanna gave me. The shirt said "My Dad's Battle is My Battle—Supporting Him Until He Wins"

On the morning of his passing--his birthday--I spoke to him this: "you won the battle dad! The cancer is dead and your alive!"

He will never die because he did not have hope in Messiah only this life, but held onto the hope of the resurrection and the life to come!

My message today is not to stand here and tell you how perfect my dad was, because I don't think that would be what he wanted. If death is a reality, then funerals should be a reality. No, they are not the place to air out one's dirty laundry, nor should they be a stage production with actors that spew out lies in order to glamourize a life that never really existed.

With that said, what I do believe my dad would have desired at his 'celebration', is for people to remember a life which began inside a cage of rejection--ending in a life fully freed, perfected in love, through the grace and mercy of the One who opened wide his cage.

My dad lived most of his life in a cage void of joy—in great despair. He was convinced, even as a young boy, that his own father's rejection of him was a result of his doing something wrong. My dad lost his smile because he felt he made his father lose his. And because he felt this way, it carried over to his Heavenly Father.

The enemy, from an early age, had convinced my dad that through his imperfections, he would never amount to anything but less than perfect. To be accepted was an endless drive that became an obsession to attain perfection outside the love of the Father. Life, in my dad's eyes, was to be wanted—was to be loved by someone. And he did whatever was necessary to meet that void in his life.

Too many times, we fail to see the good that has happened in someone else, because we can only remember the kind of person they used to be. We keep them frozen in time--locked in the refrigeration of our own unforgiveness. We refuse to acknowledge the warmth of the changes that He has done in them.

It wasn't until I took the time to look upon my own sin, did I witness what Elohim (God) was doing in my dad to set him free. And I know now that it was only by the hand of Elohim (the hand of God), that he had finally realized that to live—truly live--was to stop the striving for perfection in the eyes of man, and realize that his imperfections and weaknesses only revealed his need for the Savior.

The greatest love which Abba has shown to us, was to cause us to look into the perfect image of His Son in order to expose the horror of our own sin--for only then can we

begin to truly repent and to forgive those who have wronged us. True freedom is to look within ourselves first before we dare point the finger at someone else and cry, “look what you have done!”

True forgiveness is motivated by love. In the ancient picture language of Paleo Hebrew, love simply means “**Being the first to surrender yourself**”

1 John 3:15 (from the KJV) says, “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

I had murdered my dad in my heart. Though I remained somewhat civil with him, I had cut him off in my heart, and eradicated him from my life. And as 1 John 3 just said, there was no difference between what Cain did to his brother, and what I had done to my dad.

In 2011, I began to embrace what it truly meant to be born again from above. Though for nearly 40 years I called myself a believer, I spent my time wandering around without any sense of what being saved really meant. I had failed to believe in the power of His forgiveness, and the reality of His unmovable love that motivated it.

“God” had become the handkerchief I used to blow my snotty messes on--messes which my own hand created. And when I didn’t need Him anymore, I shoved him in my back pocket again. How I treated “God”, was the same way I treated others. Somehow, I could not receive the forgiveness He had shown me, therefore I held unforgiveness for others.

How many people was I going to keep buried in the basement of my heart because I had murdered them with my hate, while my own pride repeated over and over—“I am justified in my actions because I was wronged.”

For all those years, I had no concept of the Father’s love. Only until I realized that no one else but myself was to blame for how my life had turned out, could I begin, with compassionate eyes, to see others as my Father saw them.

In 2011, I finally begin to understand that without death, there can be no life. By His love for me, His death destroyed my death. He overcame sin and self because He possessed a greater love for His Father. He feared His Father more than He desired the pleasures of sin. His eyes remained fixed upon the **higher calling**—the higher purpose!

I finally understood, that without forgiveness, what I dealt to others would be given back to me. “Go ahead, Derek, fill up your cup of unforgiveness, test and see if He will not make me drink of it when He sits upon His judgment seat!”

Only until I finally understood that my salvation was a gift, which I must own by obedience to His Commandments, did I truly see His love working in me, through the powerful release of His forgiveness. The death sentence I deserved was cancelled because I had been forgiven.

The excitement I felt to finally be free, and to know I was free by His love and forgiveness—compelled me to go and release others whom I had held captive by my own lack of forgiveness and love.

He revealed to me that love—and only love—has the power to override my justified feelings of being wronged. For it was easy to justify how I treated people as long as I felt I was being wronged.

How do prisoners, who are tortured for their faith—years later, after their release—find it possible to forgive their torturers? Messiah Himself and even Stephen said, “They know not what they do.”

A line from one of Chuck Girard’s songs says, “We can love them and forgive them when their sin does not exceed our own”

For many, I had called to the stand, questioned, declared guilty, passed sentence and put to death those whose sin, in my eyes, exceeded my own. I was a hypocrite! I had cut off people in my life without ever having heard their confession! My only witness to their guilt was my own. I discovered that my own single witness could never bear witness to the truth.

However, His love and forgiveness birthed within me the joy of being released. He called me forth out of the grave. His love motivated that call and the joy of being released from the grave of my own misery was and is the greatest joy ever!

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

It is called “no greater love” because once your gone, you will never be able to receive the praises of men, and the “thank you’s” for offering such a great gift! Love never expects a thank you in return.

I learned that I must be motivated by that same love. I must love to the very end. The Apostle John, in his 90’s, when the assemblies were beginning to fall apart, would cry out, while being carried from place to place on his cot—“little children, just love one another!”

Once there was a son who despised his own father. It was nothing new - as the pattern went like this: the father’s own father despised him and the son’s own son despised him. Three generations of estrangement—fathers and sons.

Broken over the relationship with his son, the father made many attempts--over and over and over again--to restore what had been lost, hoping to build something he never knew how to construct with his own father.

The son was off doing his own thing—a result from a failed marriage and years of empty striving to please “God” and men. He became angry inside, and became driven to prove to the world that he was something in the eyes of people. He longed to be wanted. He longed to be accepted by someone—anyone!

Time and time again, he rejected his father—both in heaven and on earth. His earthly father reached out to him, hoping to be the kind of fatherly example he never felt he lived up to. The father never knew how to love his son, because his father never knew how to love his son. All he knew was that he wanted to try.

The father's own childhood rejection had spilled over into an adult life filled with an unending sense of inadequacy—forever grasping some way to express the longing in his heart to hold his son in his arms again.

His father saw the hurt—the pain, and the sorrow in his son. But how could he bandage the wounds of his son, when he himself lay bleeding from the murderous dagger his own father used to cut him off?

The son continued living his selfish life, with an ocean wide separation between his father and himself. There seemed to be no way to get to the other side—the side of restoration. Pride ruled his heart. The silence was deafening. Communication was non-existent.

Until one day, in March of 2015, the son cried out to “God”—“EXAMINE ME!”

“Who was I holding and not releasing,” he said. Who have I failed to forgive? Who have I not shown the true love of the Savior to—the same love of which had been graciously shown to me?

And with that, the son sat down and wrote a letter:

Hi Dad

I hear that you have been weak and not feeling well. Rebecca and I are praying for you.

Father has been doing a lot within me and there are some things I know that I need to release in order to move forward. Without bringing up unnecessary details, I want you to know that I have let go of so much regarding our relationship as far as not allowing things of the past to continue to feed bitterness and resentment. We have had discussions in the past, especially right before we came to Costa Rica and I feel much healing has taken place. Even further healing this past visit to Texas in January....

With that said, I want to take this time now to make sure that there is nothing between us. I love you Dad and try and respect and honor you as is per Scripture. I ask you to forgive me if I have hurt you in anyway. I also ask you to forgive me as in times past I have held onto bitterness and resentment towards you - but has slowly been released. I believe even our time we talked in your garage, this past visit in January and others, that we have grown in our understanding of each other. Know this, that I am my own person and my own decisions are by my own hand with no one twisting my arm.

I have had to break off much, such as spirits of rejection, hurt, being unloved and not accepted. I did this also concerning my own son as to ensure that things are broken and not passed on to him. Justin and I talk very minimally, and most of the time he drops off the planet after we talk. But it's ok.. but I believe the relationship is 100% salvageable and able to be restored to wholeness — as I believe ours will be as well.

I hold nothing against you. I love you for who you are and the person you have become. Mistakes and failures do not have to be part of the mold of our future but can influence on how the new mold is made... meaning that we learn and go forward based upon past failures. I am learning this everyday.

You are not a failure! I pray you will begin seeing yourself as Father see's you and not others around you. I, do not have all of the power to make you complete in Him but I do have the power to ensure that by my own hand, I do not allow any stumbling blocks in your path. If I have done so....please forgive me.

I guess what I am saying is, I choose and wish to live peacefully with all brethren - so much as it is in my power to do so.

Thank you for reading this, and seeing that through my own brokenness, and repentance, I have begun to be healed of so many things - - and I wanted to share that with you because I refuse to allow the separation of family to continue.

I write this with much humility and contriteness, wishing only for you to see that I am truly sorrowful.

I love you,

Derek

I held my dad in high contempt. I never gave him a chance to show me the person who he had become. I failed to give him the chance to show me that he was different. I lost so much time. The letter I had written, was just prior to finding out about the cancer. Abba knew. He knew that my dad would only be alive for another year, and that He had great plans of bringing true restoration and reconciliation between us. That was something only He could have orchestrated.

There's no time to waste anymore. Get right with people. Forgive one another. Messiah is returning for those who love Him. And those who profess they love Him, must not harbor hate against any!

After many, many years, the time had come for my dad to leave his cage of rejection, because he had finally, by accepting the love and forgiveness of the Father, and through great brokenness and repentance, stopped believing the lies that shaped his childhood—lies that he was a nobody.

And only until I stepped out of my own prison, could I see the freedom my dad had finally found. My dad waited patiently for me to come home. And when he saw me running home, he never once rejected me, nor blamed me for anything of the past. He welcomed me with arms wide open.

For the first time in my life, I was able to walk along side my dad, no longer a son, but a friend—a companion. I want you to know something. When I had come over to visit my dad the Friday before he passed, I was able to help my dad in a way that will forever be impressed within me.

With his arm around my shoulder, we slowly walked to the bathroom and back—side by side. And as I looked down at his swollen feet, shuffling along back to the bed, I realized that the Father was confirming something to me: That what had taken place between my dad and I—the reconciliation of our relationship—was being played out right before my very eyes. For as I helped my dad walk his final steps on this earth, I realized that

because of our restoration, we were finally able to come together and walk along side each other.

All my dad ever wanted was to be reconciled with his son. All he had longed for was to show him that he HAD found his smile again.

And as I remember the peaceful smile upon his face, on the day of his birthday, I was able to finally see that the one who welcomed me home with open arms, was himself, welcomed home in His open arms.

Dad had finally found the freedom he had been yearning for—aching for. He had finally discovered that his only acceptance in this life was to be found in the One who had never rejected him—His heavenly Father. And it was because of the joy he had found in that freedom, that he was able to fall asleep smiling—listening to the words of the One who had welcomed Him home:

“You didn’t make Me lose My smile child, I’ve been smiling over you since before you were born. You can fly now. Your free. Leave this cage, and fly--for it is My smile that will become the wind beneath your wings.”

FLY

The very first thing I said to my dad after arriving early on the morning of his passing, were two very tear filled questions:

What does He look like dad?
What does heaven look like?

I never knew the significance of those questions, or why I even asked them, until last night, when driving home, I remembered my dad’s favorite song. In fact, those who were there that night, may remember that when he sang his favorite song, he dedicated it to Dera Burdine.

To my dad, and to Dera—I dedicate this to you

To both of you—who are now beholding Him face to face