

LOOKING LIKE DAD

One thing I was never accused of was looking like my Dad. As many of you know, he had blonde hair and blue eyes. He was kind of a rugged man, fit from working on the farm from way before dawn to way after sunset, and – rumor has it – he was a great dancer. He also had a nose that was pretty much red any time the sun shone. I got the nose. Other than that, I used to think I looked nothing like my dad.

One day about fifteen years ago now I guess a friend of mine made a comment to me I've never forgotten. It had about 23 years since we worked together on the farm, and we both ended up in the same place at the same time for my cousin's wedding. I sang a couple of songs. During the reception, Brad came up to me and he said, "Andrew, you look just like your Dad!" I was stunned and I think I just said, "Hu-uh".

He said, "Andrew when you sang, you looked just like your Dad. He tilted his head and held his jaw exactly the way you did today. I used to sit and watch your Dad every time he sang at church because he was a good man and I loved to hear him sing. And I remember how he did it... and you look just like him."

I enjoyed that moment. I looked up to my Dad. I feared my Dad at times. And I loved and still love my Dad.

Our Scriptures for this message identify two fathers we could look like. Jesus inflamed the religious leaders of His day when He exposed them by saying whose kids they were acting like:

“If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I have come here from God,” Jesus declares in John 8:42, and in verse 44 He says, **“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!”**

Ever since sin entered the world, we have inherited the characteristics of the devil. Some may object, and it's true: we were originally made in God's image and still bear His likeness: we have consciences, inclinations toward good, and we will live forever. But sin is the order of the day and if you don't believe me, turn on the news. School shootings, abuse of power, violence in our city streets (even in Bakersfield), and assault of many kinds are commonplace. The Scriptures say ALL ... that means *all* have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and all are in need of salvation. (Romans 3:23 and 3:10).

But there is another father we could look like: He is God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, one with the Holy Spirit and the Son, Jesus Christ, who He sent as Savior of the world. In contrast to the devil's lies, hatred, and murder, God is love. The apostle James refers to Him as the Father of lights, in whom there is no variableness or shifting shadow. (James 1:17) He dwells in light, is the author of truth. He is good and His love endures forever!

As God's children, we look most like our heavenly Father when we abide in love.

[Repeat, have congregation repeat it and write it down somewhere.]

While you're writing it down somewhere, I'll tell you a tried and true, time-honored Dad joke: *Dad, I'm thirsty!* Hello thirsty, I'm Dad! Nice to meet you!

In 1 John 4:13 we read **"This is how we KNOW that we abide in Him and He in us: He has given us of His Spirit."**

I'm choosing to use the word "abide" as opposed to "live". They essentially mean the same thing but here's the difference, at least for me. "Abide in" implies a feeling of duration and direction that "to live in" doesn't give me. If I'm abiding in something then:

1. It's my home.
2. I'm staying there come what may.
3. I'm present in it.

Abiding in love has a three-fold foundation: the Holy Spirit, the testimony of the apostles, and a personal choice and confession.

- The Holy Spirit, given to us by God. 4:13, ***This is how we know that we abide in Him and He in us: He has given us of His Spirit.***
 - **God** gives us His Spirit. And it's a two-way street: It's not just us making our home in Him, staying there come what may, and being present in Him. It's Him, by the Holy Spirit, making His home in us, staying there come what may, and being present in our lives. Hallelujah!
 - God gives **us** His Spirit. Yes, it's true that you can be a child of God, but in this passage all those who come to the cross in repentance and faith are called the children of God. He lives in us individually, but also we share Him. We ought to be able to encourage each other by our stories of how the Holy Spirit has manifested His power in our lives, how He has reached through us to touch others, and how He is leading us to do greater things for the sake of Jesus.
- The testimony of the apostles, given to us in the Word to examine and receive. 4:14 says, ***"we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as Savior of the world."*** While the "we" is connected to "us" in verse 13, it also gets more specific by saying WE HAVE SEEN AND TESTIFY. This speaks to apostolic witness and instructions, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and given to the early church. This witness and instructions are the New Testament. It is given for us to examine and receive. That is as much a part of abiding in God as having the Holy Spirit within you.
- The third part of the foundation is a personal choice and confession about who Jesus is in your life. Look at verse 15, ***"If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God."*** Jesus is one being and substance with the Father. He is God, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He was from eternity with God, and took on flesh in order to dwell among us to redeem us, and in time all of creation. When we acknowledge Jesus is the Son of God we are agreeing that He is the Lord, sent from the Father as Savior of the world. That's His title, that's His place, and He shares it with no other.

Foundation: Holy Spirit, Apostle's Testimony, Personal Choice and Confession. Those three things are the foundation of abiding in love.

Okay: time for another Dad joke. "You know how SCUBA divers always go out of the boat backwards? Why don't they go forward? [Cuz if they went forward, they'd fall in the boat.]"

You know what, going backwards into something is a great picture of faith and surrender! God, I can't see where You're taking me: but I know my home is in You, I'm staying in You come what may, and I want to be present in You and all that You bring into my life. And when we fall backwards in complete surrender to God, we find that ...

God is Love. [Ask everyone to turn to their neighbors and say it, then look straight ahead. SAY IT LOUD. Now whisper it.]

4:16 – "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them."

- This is a great statement of truth: God is love. The Greek word is *agape*, which is an intense commitment-centered love.
- This is crazy for our culture: God is love, but Love is not God. God defines love, love doesn't define God.
- This love is rooted in the holiness and purity of God.

Abiding in love is how we look like Dad. It is easier said than done. This world is full of distractions that would pull us away from an abiding life. What can you do to re-focus when you get distracted? There are three oft-repeated elements of focus... when I do these I can focus my attention on abiding in love. First is what I sing and say with my lips. That's why singing to God is a big deal. You're saying stuff to God but you're also singing it, which releases a totally different thing in your spirit than just saying it. Second are the voices I choose to listen to and images I choose to see. Thirdly are acts of service I can do with my hands and feet. These aren't mysterious; we've heard it a thousand times. But here's the thing: I should only need to focus on them when I'm off-balance. Otherwise, I'm abiding in God and God's love and He leads me to sing, say, listen to, view, and do those things that please Him.

A practical tip for abiding: The Abba Prayer

One way that I have found to abide is to meditate. Eastern meditation prescribes an emptying of the mind. Some people may need that at first, but Christian meditation includes repeating a phrase of Scripture or a biblically based prayer. Probably the most intimate word for your dad is the word "Daddy." It implies a healthy loving relationship with your dad – one that's close. In Scripture, it's expressed in the word "Abba." In Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 Paul tells us that God puts the Holy Spirit in our hearts and His Spirit causes us to cry out, "Abba!" Well I don't know. I don't want to get too emotional. I like to be a little bit detached from my religion. Well, go ahead and be detached from your religion. If you are abiding in love, though, you're gonna get attached. So, here we go. Everyone sit up. We are going to meditate.

Everybody take a deep breath and gently blow it out. Now this time, you'll take a deep breath and say "Abba, I belong to You." You can turn this into a slower – and thus perhaps more profound exercise – as you breathe, and exhale and say "Abba", then "I belong" then "to You." You can do it in the morning when you wake up and in the evening as you go to bed. Do it any time you're stressed. Because if you have the Holy Spirit in You, if you examine and receive the testimony of the apostles, and if you choose and confess Jesus Christ Savior of the world as Your God, then you DO belong to Abba, and you need to meditate on it so its meaning can sink into you.

"Perfected in Love": God is love. And as we abide in love, we become perfected in love. In 1 John 4:17-19 we read, ¹⁷**This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.** ¹⁸**There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.** "

On Facebook this week, I asked some questions: In a few words, describe your Dad to me at different stages of your life ... here are some responses: *(note to reader: *'s are linked in other categories)*

[Reader: these responses were summarized, not read point for point, in the sermon.]

Childhood:

1. Hard-working and provider, but not very present or emotionally available (*)
2. Unconditional love, laughter, music, Jesus, and oh... lots of hard work sprinkled in (my sister)
3. Feared
4. Strict, scary and quick-tempered. (**)
5. My biggest hero with a very godly touch.
6. Fun, teacher, leader
7. Loving, adoring, wise, but also very silly and goofy.
8. Teacher, leader, Buckeye. (God bless America! I haven't preached til I mention my Buckeyes.)
9. Traveled a lot, but made sure he was there for important events. Made us feel like we could do anything through hard work and quitting was never an option.
10. As a pre-teen, I watched my Dad demonstrate strength and unwavering faith even through the loss of his wife to breast cancer.
11. Great sense of humor! Read to us, sang to us, and played jacks with us.
12. My hero, security, protector, and unwavering supporter.
13. Hardworking but addicted.
14. From two women who were born as the babies of their family: I was his favorite. As the firstborn, and a boy, that one hurts. Haha.
15. Silly, goofy, always present

PAUSE TO TALK ABOUT BEING PRESENT. Men, our children – and our wives – need us to be present in their lives. I'm **very** imperfect at this. But it is important to talk about, even though I'm mostly talking to myself. I'm afraid we have a generation raised by loving, well-meaning parents who are in the room but absent. Engage with them. Observe what's happening. Encourage them. Listen. And tell your wife and your kids how much they mean to you. Your active presence in their lives is better than a fancy vacation, all the clothes they could want, and an education at a prestigious college. Your active

presence in their lives will reap more rewards for you than finishing that last important but nonessential task at work, interacting with friends on social media, watching the news, or keeping up with your favorite game.

Teenager:

1. Relevant. Present. Encourager.
2. The silliness and goofiness got embarrassing!
3. Loving. Aggravating. Encouraging. Patient, guiding, supportive, caring.
4. Was not around.
5. Mixed bag... worked hard to send me to a good school but that made him less available.
6. "I'm going to make you strong enough to deal with life." (***)
7. Three words: "Be a man!"
8. Rough.

Adulthood:

1. As I became an adult, I was able to see Dad's love for me once I understood people love and receive love differently. He is now Spirit-filled (which makes a huge difference!) and tenderly raising my niece and nephew at age 83... pretty impressive. (*)
2. As an adult I better understand he was trying to shape and prepare me to be an adult man. When I get the chance I love to hang out and do things with him.
3. We discovered love and relationship in my mid-20's. (***)
4. My Dad will always be my best friend. I'm proud to be called his son.
5. My childhood pastor's wife – one of the most joyful people I know – told me this about her Dad... I had no idea: Andrew my dad was a precious man of few words but so very present. In the world's eyes he was probably damaged; orphaned at 12, moved from home to home, some not nice at all, graduated high school, served 12 years in the navy, came out to be called back in when so many of his buddies were killed at Pearl Harbor. He NEVER spoke of any of that, but I always knew he adored me by his many acts of kindness and generosity.

I remember KNOWING beyond a shadow of a doubt that my Dad loved me. [*Reader: bracketed portions didn't make it into the actual sermon.* I also know that he worked hard to do things to build a good life for his kids and wife, not monetarily, but emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. He sang in a Gospel quartet and often took me with him to sing at various churches. Dad treated Mom like a queen and never, that I remember, so much as raised his voice to her. Mom and Dad took Bible classes because he was hungry for the Word and wanted to make sure he received excellent biblical teaching. He and Mom drove ninety minutes one way every week to do that, and he paid for the classes. My first knowledge of the book of Proverbs came from that class, as they were assigned to do a family project about one of the themes in Proverbs. True to his work ethic, he chose Diligence and Laziness... I remember coming up with a cartoon character named Pa Verty, the patriarch of the Sloth Family. The irony is that my Dad was and is the hardest working poor person I know. But he was rich in his soul, and he worked hard to make sure we knew what that kind of wealth was like.

[He was elected to, and served many years on, the local public school board. As Vice Chair of the board, it was his responsibility to make sure the board meetings were opened with the reading of Scripture and prayer. Yes, those were different times... way before mass shootings became a regular news item. Sometimes I wonder if those are related. But I digress.]

At nighttime, especially if we were going through something unsettling in our lives, or if we were spending the night in an unfamiliar place, he would often sing songs to my sister and me, standing in the hall or in the doorway of our bedrooms – always hymns or choruses of the church – until we would settle down and fall asleep. My little sister was his princess (that’s what her name Sarah means after all) and “Tiny Treasure.” I was his wrestling buddy. Somehow he always won.]

In spite of knowing he loved me, I was afraid of my Dad sometimes. Dad was old school, and it was the ‘70’s. In Ohio. When I lied or disobeyed or talked back to my mother, I had reason to be afraid. Dad never punished me when he was mad. He always waited and cooled down. Then he would ask me if I knew why I was about to be punished. I had to answer. I always knew. He never took off his belt and never used his hand. It was always a wooden paddle, signed by all his fraternity brothers. Dad had good sized biceps and a swing that could knock a ball out of any church league softball field in the county. And when the board of education was applied to the seat of knowledge, to coin a Wesley phrase, my rear end felt strangely warm.

When I was younger I was motivated extrinsically. It wasn’t enough always to know I was doing the right thing. I needed rewarded and as a child, I needed correction. Mostly, as I grew, I needed correction less. As we mature, our relationships with our Dads change. Of course, all family relationships are colored by humanity – theirs and ours: weaknesses, addictions, frailties, mistakes. But for many of us early on and maybe more or less through adolescence, Dad is the Lawgiver and Enforcer. As we mature, hopefully, we understand the love of our fathers differently. So, we can understand God our Father differently as we mature in Him.

In youth, fear of punishment is a legitimate motivator. Many people turn to Christ because they are afraid of hell. So? Fear is not illegitimate. But if that’s where you stay in your relationship with God, then you’re not abiding in love. As you mature in Christ, you become less motivated by fear and more motivated by pleasing God because you understand that He loves you and your love for Him is growing. And then even that changes. Sure you want to please God, but as your relationship with Him matures even more, you realize that all He does in your life comes from a heart of love. And you begin to abide in Him even more... you settle down in Him! You love Him, and He begins to determine the course and trajectory of your life. THEN you’ll be conscious of receiving His love for you, HIS LOVE is flowing through you to others – just like a vine or a blood vessel. We are being perfected in love.

[As we mature in our relationship with God, we move past carrots and sticks. We progress from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. We move from a behavioral understanding of His love to a relational one. We move from fear-driven to love-driven. As the Holy Spirit has more of us and more and more of our relationship emanates from **being** in Him rather than doing things for Him, then we see that perfect love is driving out fear.]

What could God be speaking to you today? Is the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, and a personal choice and confession present in your life? Are you abiding in love? How is that working in your life? For me, He's challenging me about being present. Whatever you hear God speak to you about today, I want to encourage you not to leave today without writing it down and making a commitment to do something about it. If you want, write it down, sign your name, and hand it to me after the service. Put down your email address too. I'll pray for you twice this week about it, and I'll send you a note of encouragement this week.

SUMMARY: We look most like our heavenly Father when we are abiding in love. Abiding means we make our home there, we stay there come what may, and we are present there. The foundation of our abiding is the Holy Spirit, the testimony of the apostles we can examine and receive in the Scriptures, and our personal choice and confession about who Jesus is in our lives. God is love; He defines it and the love we are designed to abide in is rooted in His holiness and purity. As we mature in Christ and abide in love, we move past performance-based motivation to realize what God designed for all of us: a relationship of love that casts out fear. Brothers and sisters, we love because He first loved us.

In abiding in this love, we look like Dad. Amen.