

Today we are at week three in our study of Isaiah 9:6 and the **four titles** Isaiah gave to Jesus. There are implications here as to who Christ is and what he's like. It says, "***For to us a child is born. To us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.***"

There is something about Jesus being called father that makes this much more personal for us. Hands up if you ever had a father. We all did. Just that word "Father" begins to elicit images, and memories and emotions begin to churn up in us, and maybe for you, the memories and the images of your earthly father were fantastic. Maybe dad was great, and when you think about him, you've got great memories. And I can tell you this, as a father myself, and I think I speak for all of us dads, it is not easy being dad. We are far from perfect, and we make our share of mistakes. And if you grow up and you look back on your father, and the memories that you have are good ones, be thankful. What more could we ask for as a dad? But the reality is, not all of us have those kind of memories about our father. And so all of a sudden when we think about our father, be it good, but he's far from perfect, or be it not good at all, what we tend to do is, we tend to project the image of our earthly father onto our everlasting Father. That's a very dangerous thing to do.

For many people [3 pics] when they look at God as father what they picture is someone who's never satisfied. It doesn't matter what you do or how much effort you put in it's never enough. I read recently about a woman called Shelley. Her dad, who is a good man, he's a good man, but he is normal. He made mistakes, and one of the mistakes that he made was, he just couldn't express affection and affirmation in words of love to his daughter. So my wife, Shelley, didn't realize this until she was an adult, but she realizes, looking back, that she began to perform for her dad. She began to try to do everything perfect to get it just right, because she so wanted her dad to be proud of her and tell her that he loved her. And it all came to a head at her college graduation. She realized, looking back, that one of the main motives for going to college was that no one else in her immediate family had ever been to college. And not only was she going to go to college, but she was going to graduate with honours. And the day came, the ceremony. The place is packed with friends and with family, and the ceremony time is there, and Shelley, her dream was not of walking across the platform in front of the podium to receive her degree. No, what she was dreaming about was when the ceremony was done and she would go and she would look for her family, and her family, with her dad leading the way, would come looking for her, and they would walk up and they would come face-to-face and meet each other, and her dad would look her in the eye. And finally, she'd hear those words, "I am so proud of you, and I love you," and he would just embrace her. Well, the moment came. The place is packed. Family and friends and, and Shelley walked across the platform, received her degree, nearly a 4.0 with honours. The ceremony was done, and now was the moment. And it was like just like she pictured it in her mind. She, she's going through the hustle and bustle of people walking around trying to find family members. She sees her family, and she begins to approach them, and her dad's leading the way, just like she saw in her mind. And they come closer and closer together, and they get face to face and her dad looks at her, and this is what he says. "Well, it's getting late. It's a long drive home. We'd better get going." She's crushed. Crushed. You have experienced something similar to that. You've performed for your dad. Dad, he just, he just couldn't get it out of him to show that love.

My experience is that my dad would never think of expressing emotion in that way to me. He might to our boys but not to me. It's not that he doesn't care, he and my mum help us out and we do things together and they are supportive but I don't really remember him ever saying he was proud of something I had done. As I was thinking about what to say today I realised I was a bit like that with my boys and I don't want it to be that way.

Maybe you have experienced something similar to that. You've performed for your dad but he just couldn't get it out of him to show that love. Maybe you even went to the point of rebellion to get dad's attention, and now, you've taken that same perspective and you bring it into our relationship with Christ. And we don't really believe that God is truly satisfied with us, so we try to do what we can to get Him to love us. And so, when we look at our everlasting Father through the lens of our earthly father, not only may we see a father who's never satisfied, but when we look at Him through the lens of our earthly father, we may see a father who's always angry. Maybe when dad was home, and he came home from work and it was like walking on eggshells around your house. You were just (whispering). At any moment he can fly off the handle and start yelling and is full of anger. Maybe your dad said words to you like, "You're never going to amount to anything. You're a loser. We never meant to have ... You're a mistake." And it just ripped you up inside. Maybe it was even worse for you than that and you were subject to physical or sexual abuse. If that's been your journey and you look through that to Jesus your everlasting Father, and you get a bad taste in your mouth, I can't blame you. I'm sorry that happened to you.

You see, when we look at Jesus, our everlasting Father, through the lens of our earthly father, it can really mess things up. We might see a father who is never satisfied, a father who's always angry, and when, when we look at Him through the lens of our earthly father, we may as well, for many of us, this probably affects us, that we may see a father who is seldom there. Maybe, as a child, you grew up the victim of divorce, and all of a sudden, dad who is there, is now not there. I mean, seldom there or not there at all, and maybe it was worse than that. Maybe, maybe dad was practically ripped out of your family's life, and you were forced to grow up without dad being there.

Hopefully your journey has not been that extreme. We've all got our own story, but just for a second lay that down and let's give our everlasting Father the opportunity to reveal to us who He really is. Just for a second, let's not look at Him through the lens of our earthly father. Let's do this. Let's look at Him right here. Let's look at Him through the lens of scripture, because when we do, we are going to see an everlasting Father that maybe you've never seen before. Because when we look at Jesus, our everlasting Father, through the lens of scripture we are going to see an everlasting Father who is compassionate.

Psalm 103:8 *The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.* This Father is compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love. One of the most liberating moments you can have is when you realise that there is nothing you can do to earn God's love – it doesn't matter how hard you try you can't make God love you more. Perhaps you're here today and you've been performing for someone because you never felt accepted and you're trying to bring that into your relationship with Jesus. You go to church. You read your Bible. You pray, not because you're overwhelmed with the grace of God in your life, but because you feel like you have to do those things, because deep down inside

God doesn't really accept you and love you for who you are. He's compassionate, and you've been working, and I want you to hear this - **He says** to those of us who are trying to perform to earn God's love: *"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul."* (Matt 11:28-29) Rest. Just rest. Rest. Stop trying to do everything right. Live a life that glorifies God, but stop trying to do everything right because you think God doesn't accept you. Through your relationship with Christ, He accepts you, and there's nothing that we can do. God cannot love you any more or any less than He already does, so just rest.

Gal 4:6-7 says this: *Because you are his sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.* You are no longer a slave – You don't need to work to get credit. We work in response to God's love working in and through us. We are heirs of God. It doesn't mean everything will go smoothly for us - **2 Cor 1:3** *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*

So, our heavenly father is compassionate. He also cares for us: **Matt 10:29-31** *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*

Isaiah 46:4 *I will still be the same when you are old and gray, and I will take care of you. I created you. I will carry you and always keep you safe.*

Deut 1:31 *There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place."*

Our everlasting Father is compassionate and caring and we need to understand that. He is not angry with you. He is satisfied with you, and He loves you, and He cares about you.

We look at Him through the lens of scripture, and we see Jesus, an everlasting Father, who is incredibly compassionate and caring beyond what we could comprehend. We also see an everlasting Father who's always there. Always. As far as being loved by God is concerned it doesn't matter if you never come to church again. It would be good to keep coming. It doesn't matter if you never read your Bible again, if you never pray again, if you go into a tailspin of a life that dishonours God, and it doesn't matter if you mess up your marriage, you family, your money, your job. It doesn't matter if you do everything wrong, He is always there. And if you don't believe me, believe Him, because this is what He says. **Heb 13:5** *"Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you."* The last time I looked, the definition of never was never. It's as simple as that.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! 1 John 3:1

There were times when my children were small that they would fall and graze their knees and it seemed like the end of the world. There were tears and snot and they just needed a cuddle and a hanky. Maybe you're here today and you feel that life has dealt you blow after blow. And maybe you're bleeding at the knees and you're bleeding at your elbows, and nobody sitting around you right now knows that life has dealt you a blow and the pain that you're going through. But I'll tell you what. When you go running and screaming and you jump into the arms of your everlasting Father, He's going to wrap you in his arms and whisper in your ear. He's going to pray for you, and He's going to calm you. He's going to give you His peace, and He will hold you, and He will never ever, ever let you go. Never.