

“A Tribute to Christian Fathers”

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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To all who are fathers: Happy Father’s Day! A woman by the name of Sonora Smart Dodd of Spokane, Washington was sitting in the Central Methodist Episcopal Church in 1909, listening to a sermon on the newly inaugurated Mother’s Day when she felt strongly that a day should be reserved to honor fathers as well, like her own dad, William Smart, a Civil War veteran who had been left to rear her and her siblings when her mother passed away giving birth to her sixth child. In Sonora’s eyes, her father had been sacrificial, courageous, selfless and loving. He exemplified all that fathers should be. Since he had been born in the month of June, she chose to hold the first celebration of Father’s Day in Spokane on June 19, 1910. Interestingly, that makes this celebration 100 years old to the very day (though Father’s Day is actually tomorrow, Sunday). In 1926 a National Father’s Day Committee was formed in New York City and in 1956 by a Joint Resolution in Congress, it was recognized nationally. In 1966 President Lyndon Johnson issued the first proclamation honoring fathers and in 1972 President Richard Nixon established by law a permanent Father’s Day on the third Sunday of June.

Today we salute dads. Fatherhood was created by God, generously bestowing upon humanity the miraculous capacity for procreation. Today I thank the Lord for my dad. He wasn’t perfect, but he was loving, true and inspiring. My mother never once had to wonder if the paycheck was coming home or if it would be spent on liquor or gambling. His habits of thrift and industry were amazing. He was known for his disciplined shopping, always on the lookout for a bargain. However, a time or two it went to the extreme. There was once an occasion when he approached the manager of the produce section of our local grocery store and pointing to the bananas, which were then on special for 2 cents a pound, he pleaded, “Can you please take these off ‘sale’? We’re getting awfully tired of them.” The house he and my mother purchased, in which I and my siblings grew up, would fit inside my garage. Never once in his entire life did he own a new car, always spending less on a used one, in order to make sure his four children were fed, clothed and placed in church school.

It was a good life that he provided, making sure that on Sabbath afternoons there was time to take a restless young kid lizard hunting in the back country and on other days of the week played catch with his son in the front yard. It’s shocking for me to think that although he seemed old at the time when he succumbed to bone cancer, he was only three years older than I am now. I look forward to seeing my dad when “that Day” comes. No doubt many of you can recall such incidents when your dad demonstrated sacrifice, love and godly wisdom. Thank God for dads!

Because they play such a vital role in the character formation of their children, the Bible has counsel for dads. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise: ‘that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’ And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:1-4.

Two perspectives we would see today as we think of the spiritual application of “Father’s Day.” What can we learn from looking at Father’s Day through the lens of Christian thinking? There are two thoughts I would like to share with you. First, we would see a representation of the Heavenly Father’s great love and devotion as it is revealed in earthly dads. We catch a glimpse of the reflection of God’s paternal love in stories given in the Scriptures, two of which we’ll look at briefly. The heart-breaking anguish and affection of David, expressed over his renegade son Absalom, speaks to God’s great heart of tenderness and pity.

Though his son harbored murder in his heart toward King David and sought to wrest the throne from the one who had given him life (See in this story the assault of Lucifer against God), David’s instruction to his military captains reveals his “father’s heart” of love still yearning for his wayward son. “Now the king had commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, ‘Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.’ And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains orders concerning Absalom.” II Samuel 18:5.

When Absalom was slain and the news reached David, witness his breaking heart spilled in grief. “Just then the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, ‘There is good news (??), my lord the king! For the LORD has avenged you this day of all those who rose against you.’ And the king said to the Cushite, ‘Is the young man Absalom safe?’ And the Cushite answered, ‘May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise against you to do you harm, be as that young man is!’ Then the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: ‘O my son Absalom--my son, my son Absalom--if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!’” II Samuel 18:31-33.

If this story was recorded for our instruction and David was indeed the “man after God’s own heart,” can we see how our Lord, the heavenly Father, will agonize over the eventual death of those who “rise against Him.” Will it be a day of “good news” when Lucifer, the creature of His creation, the one who was a “covering cherub” occupying a place close to God’s throne, comes to his end? Will God delight in the destruction of those who rebelled against Him?

Will it not be that David’s anguish was but a dim portrayal of the suffering of our Creator God when that day comes? A Father’s heart beats in the breast of the Eternal One. Was that not the term Jesus gave as the proper and appropriate form of address when we pray? He said, “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” Matthew 6:9. The paternal love of His Father was the favorite theme of Christ. It was Jesus’ great desire that we would come to see God, not as a stern taskmaster; not as a vengeful tyrant or cruel despot (as the pagans viewed their deities), but as a tender hearted and loving Father.

We also see paternal love of God on display in the story given by Jesus concerning the returning prodigal. How the father's heart in the parable must have been pierced by the crass request of his younger son, requesting that his inheritance be doled out while the father was still living. What was that saying? "Dad, I really wish you were dead so I can get on with my life. But since you're still here, can you at least give me my money now so I can enjoy it?" How thoughtless! How rude! What a pay-back for the love and sacrifice of the father! Of course, we've never thought or said anything like that to our parents, have we?

And yet, the dad responded to his son's request, no doubt having to liquidate part of the family property in order to come up with the cash. Off went the son to party in the city, while dad and the older brother were left behind to mind the farm. But the day finally came when the money and the friends ran out, that the son realized that things really were pretty good back at home and even the servants were better off than he was, slopping pigs in the stench-filled sty. He composed a repentance speech and turned his mud-caked feet toward home.

What was the father's reaction in the story? Does the Bible say that the father sternly reprimanded him for his poor choice? Does the Bible say that the father lectured him on the principle of "You reap what you sow"? Does the Bible say that the father held his nose and said, "Why don't you take a bath and then maybe we can talk"?

What does the Bible say? First, you have to "read between the lines" to catch the full vision of this father's affection toward his son. "When he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." Luke 15:20. What do you think it means when it says, "when he was still a great way off, his father saw him"? It can mean only that the father had been out watching for his son. Every day he was out in the pathway scanning the horizon, searching for that familiar profile to come back to him. This is what God's love is like!

In the classic 103rd Psalm, David writes, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust." Psalm 103:8-14.

You may ask, "How is it that He, the great God, the Omnipotent One, can say that 'He knows our frame and remembers that we are dust'? He's up in heaven where everything is perfect and nothing goes wrong. Does He really know what I'm going through?" The Bible can make this statement because the great and Omnipotent One came to this earth and put on this flesh, this mortal dust, and lived as we do. He knows our frame and remembers that we are dust because He knows by experience what it is like to live on this planet in its sinful condition. He knows temptation and trial; He knows fatigue; He knows rejection; He knows sorrow; in short, He knows

how you feel. “We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15. The God Who reigns above the heights of the galaxies knows what you go through every day.

It is Jesus, our High Priest, Who “as a Father” knows our “frame” and “remembers that we (like He was on this earth) are made of dust.” Is it confusing to think of Jesus (Whom we usually identify as the “Son”) as being our “Father”? Not really. It’s part of the marvelous mystery of the Godhead. Jesus is the Son of God. There’s no question about that. Yet He is also our Father.

What makes a father, anyway? It is the giving of life. A man may be a husband many years, but he is not a father till a child is born to him. Is it not true that our life is in and by Jesus? He is the Source of our life, isn’t He? “For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.” John 5:21. To the stubborn Jews He said, “You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” John 5:40. “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life.” I John 5:11, 12. Our life is by, through and in Christ. He is the One Who has given us life. It is therefore proper to think of Him as being our Father because He has done exactly what a father does: He has given us life.

What did the prophet Isaiah say about the One to be born into the human race? “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6. Notice the paradox presented in this prophecy: The One Who is the “Child,” the One Who is called “the Son” is our “Father,” our “Everlasting Father.” Is it improper to think of Jesus, the Son of God, as “Father”? Not at all! It’s biblical. It is through Him that we have life. When you think of “Father’s Day,” think of Jesus and His great love toward us.

Let us turn our attention to another way of thinking of “Father’s Day” in the spiritual sense. You could make a strong case that the term “Father’s Day” lends itself to being applied to the Sabbath. God is the eternal “Father,” and His holy day is the Sabbath. Of that there can be no doubt. Every Sabbath should be a “Father’s Day.” But that is not the precise direction we’re going right now. We’re going to consider “His Day” from a different angle. Besides the Sabbath, is there another way of understanding the term, “Father’s Day,” “God’s Day”; or, to change the words slightly, “The Day of the Lord”?

Does God have a “Day”? “He owns all of them,” you might say. But does the Father have a “special day”? What is the Bible talking about when it refers to the “Day of the Lord”?

It is speaking of the great day when Jesus will come in the clouds and take us home, isn’t it. The “Day of the Lord” represents the climax of earth’s history. Question: should we be thinking about that great event today? Absolutely! How can anyone who knows anything about Bible prophecy not be thinking that the Day of the Lord is very near! Just this week more earthquakes, deadly floods and other disasters. The Day of the Lord is close at hand. Remember this application of “Father’s Day” when you think of “Father’s Day” in the earthly sense.

The Old Testament closes with the promise, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." Malachi 4:5. The Apostle Peter preached, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and notable day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." Acts 2:20, 21. Paul affirmed, "We are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus." II Corinthians 1:14.

These passages, and many others, point us to "His Day" as being the final climax of all things, when He appears in glory and saves His children. This will be "His Day." Often a wedding is spoken of as being the "bride's day." In this case, it is the heavenly Groom, Who speaks of the wedding of the Lamb as "His day." It is the day to which Jesus looks forward with longing that cannot be expressed.

It is interesting that Christ referred to His experience, His ordeal on the cross as His "hour," but His coming in glory as His "day." Think of this contrast, "hour" being briefer by far than "day." How typical of His buoyant optimism to consider it in that way. Let's review a few Bible passages about the cross being "His hour." When Jesus began His ministry, He attended a wedding at Cana, jeopardized because the beverage supply ran short. You remember the story. His mother brought this to His attention and He replied, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." John 2:4.

On Tuesday before the crucifixion He was teaching in the temple. "These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come." John 8:20. That week He said, "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father save Me from this hour?' But for this purpose I came to this hour." John 12:27. "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world...." John 13:1.

In Gethsemane Thursday evening He said, to His disciples, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners." Matthew 26:45. This is conclusive evidence that He considered the experience of the cross to be "His hour." The great event to which we look forward, on the other hand, He considered to be "His day," the "day of the Lord." When you think of "Father's Day," let that thought come into your mind. Remember that our Father, the Lord, speaks of His "Day" to come, when He will return in glory. What a great day that will be!

A good father will do anything possible to protect his family and ensure that they are safe and if they are traveling, that they will arrive at their destination unharmed. "King Air Five Five Nine Delta Whiskey, I'm declaring an emergency." These were the words in April of 2009 of Doug White, who is a pilot. Well, he had about four months, 230 hours of training in a Cessna, which is considered a very simple airplane, one suitable for a person learning the basics of flying. Now he and his family were returning to Monroe, Louisiana, from Marco Island, Florida, where they had joined other family members for his brother's funeral. They were in a chartered twin-engine King-

Air 200 piloted by Air Force veteran Joe Cabuk and had just taken off, climbing to about 2,000 feet, with his wife Terry and two teen aged daughters in the passenger cabin and Doug sitting up front, when he noticed that Joe the pilot was slumped over in his seat.

White said, "I looked over and his chin was on his chest. He made a loud, guttural sound, kind of a groan, and his eyes rolled back, and his hands never left his lap. It was quick, it was sudden and it was final." Less than 10 minutes into their flight, Joe Cabuk was dead of a heart attack. What were they going to do? As Doug tried to make sense of all the instruments on the panel, he noticed that the plane seemed to be set on auto-pilot with 10,000 feet selected, but when they reached that elevation, rising 1,500 per minute, the plane just kept on climbing. Doug realized that the plane could stall and crash. They were in serious trouble.

Doug knew nothing of flying this plane; he had been inside a King-Air only once before. His 230 hours on the Cessna 172 seemed woefully inadequate. Later air controller Lisa Grimm (who herself had been on the job only four months) tried to explain the challenge. "It would be like taking a teenager who has a learner's permit for driving a car and putting them in a manual stick shift in a NASCAR race."

Doug was able to establish radio contact with the control tower and while other controllers relayed instructions from a King-Air pilot on the phone, Lisa slowly talked White down from the 17,000 feet elevation to which he had climbed, and then handed him over to the controllers at Ft. Meyers, Florida, Airport. Though things became quite chaotic in the next minutes, to everyone's great relief, Doug was able to land the plane safely on Runway 6.

A good father will do anything possible to ensure the safety of his family. Doug White was taken by surprise that day and learned something about flying an airplane with which he had no knowledge. Our Heavenly Father is never taken by surprise. When death entered the cockpit of the human family, He stepped in and prepared an emergency landing to get His family home. Jesus came down here to pilot the aircraft. Now He waits for the great day, "His Day," when in beauty and splendor unsurpassed He will come to this planet for His family. Are you looking forward to His Day, the Day of the Lord? Are you longing for Him to come and take you home? That will be a "Happy Father's Day"!