

Three Dimensional Love

Ephesians 6: 1-4, 10-20

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Billie Frey, my father, was one of the most significant influences in my spiritual life, and in fact, in all other aspects of my life. My dad's personal faith and understanding inspired courage and hope, and with the partnership of my mother, Shirley, I was nurtured, encouraged and supported. I experienced a three-dimensional love in my family. I didn't need special 3-D glasses to see it with the eyes of my heart. My Dad died in the spring before I was ordained and accepted the call to First Church. I remember and honor him today because he lived his life in such a way that I wanted to be like him. He still is my role model in parenting, in friendships and in my faith journey. I am so grateful that my two sons, Ed and Tom, regarded him as a second father and have reflected his love and life in their own relationships with their children.

Before I continue, I want to acknowledge that I am fully aware that Father's Day may be a painful time for some of you for a variety of reasons. To you for whom Father's day is painful, as a faith community we share your sorrow and anguish and hold you in our prayers.

With that being recognized, I think it is appropriate that today we make a distinction: there are fathers and there are also those who are like fathers to us; there are dads and those who are like dads to us. These special persons can be male or female, a relative; an older friend or a neighbor; perhaps, even a coach, a teacher or a scout leader. Some of us are blessed to have more than one of these special relationships. Each of us is a child of God. Each of us is unique and each relationship is unique. Some relationships are challenging and prickly, while others are as smooth as melted butter; sometimes they are both within the span of two minutes.

Jesus, himself, chose to refer to God as his father. But when Jesus uses the image of God as father, the clear implication is that God is like a loving parent. God is not so much a reflection of what an earthly parent is, but an earthly parent should be a reflection or embodiment of a loving and personal God. The Bible is full of instructions on what it means to be a good, earthly parent, father or mother...so we pause and consider the very important roles of earthly parents, and of our heavenly parent, God.

Today, I bring three stories and three objects to share with you: a football, a golf club, and a child's priceless artwork.

As a parent, disciplining was always challenging for me. I wanted my precious sons to love me, but sometimes I had to make unpopular decisions. When I read this story, I remembered when my rules were being questioned and tested and I know that as a kid, I had done the same thing to my parents. All of you have either been 14 once in your life or will eventually be 14 years old. Dell is 14, and here's his story:

“You just don’t want me to have any fun!” Dell shouted, as he slammed out of the house and stomped through the backyard. He had no idea where he was going and no way to get rid of his anger, and he was a little nervous that he might be acting childish.

Dell hated the control his parents exercised over him. His friends got to do whatever they wanted, and some of them were dating already. At 14, Dell felt he should have some privileges. What made those other kids so special? Why didn’t his parents trust him?

“Dell?” It was his dad. For a moment, Dell was tempted to ignore him, but he couldn’t find the resolve. He turned around reluctantly.

“What?” he asked. He almost missed the football flying through the air and had to quickly throw up his hands to block it. “Geez, Dad!”

He held the pigskin in his hands, tempted to toss it aside. But there was his father, waiting patiently, a smile on his face. Dell swallowed his anger and tossed the ball back. He supposed there could be worse things than having a father who tossed a football around with him, a dad who wanted to keep him pure of heart so that he would do what was right. [from *Quiet Moments with God Devotional* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Honor Books, 2002), pp. 170-171]

Wow! The father’s smile, his patience, his presence, his vision for his child: what an affirmation of a three-dimensional love infused with hope!

Have you ever noticed how children can keep us adults on our toes? Children have such enthusiasm, energy, and creativity that they don’t seem to miss a detail or any subtle change in the world around them. In his wisdom and observation of children, Robert Fulghum says: “Don’t worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.” Children often take their cues from the adults in their lives. Children watch us to see what we do with our lives.

Any avid golfers here today? A young woman had learned to golf from her dad. Her father fondly remembered an afternoon once spent with her when she was just three. He was practicing with his clubs in the yard while she played nearby. As he prepared for each swing, he would look to his left to aim the shot, then back to his right to make sure the child was out of harm’s way, and only then would he take his shot.

Soon, he noticed that his daughter was also playing golf. She had taken a stick to use as a club and he watched as she set her club, carefully looked left, then right, then took her shot. In her perception, proper golfing form required that you look both ways before you swing. Apparently, his example left quite an impression on her. [from *Quiet Moments with God Devotional* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Honor Books, 2002), pp. 256-257]

When Jesus said, “You are the light of the world,” Jesus was speaking about the ways our words and actions can make a difference. However, the most profound message we send

is the one we live on a day-to-day basis. And it's never more important than when we don't know that anyone is paying attention. Because someone is always paying attention!

Without a doubt, three-dimensional love can transform a child's life. Have you ever been the recipient of a child's three-dimensional love that not only included you, but also expressed a contagious love of life?

"Dad, Dad, guess what, guess what!" Crystal screamed as she bounded into the room and jumped into her father's lap.

"What? What?" he exclaimed with equal vigor and enthusiasm. One of his greatest joys was seeing how she seemed to attack life with a voracious appetite for discovery. Before she could even respond, he remembered a similar time when Crystal was only five years-old. She came home from school, talking nonstop: in her hand was a brochure that the teacher had read to the class about the nearby coral reefs. A couple of weeks later, when the class went on a glass-bottom boat ride over the reefs, Crystal had memorized that brochure word-for-word, and delighted everyone on board by sharing her new-found knowledge.

Then, capturing his attention again, Crystal announced with glee, "My picture won first place in the County Art Fair!" His heart was overwhelmed with joy as he shared in her accomplishment. He was so proud of her. But, more importantly, he was so glad that God had blessed his life through her, and he was delighted to hear her news. . [from *Quiet Moments with God Devotional* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Honor Books, 2002), pp. 100-101]

God, our heavenly parent, also takes great joys in our accomplishments as parents: when we discipline by affirming love and hope (holding up football), by being a role model worthy to follow (holding golf club), and by showing thankfulness and enthusiasm (holding up child's priceless artwork).

Three-dimensional love is the echo of God's life within us. Remember, we don't need special 3-D glasses to see that three-dimensional love with the eyes of our hearts. Indeed, three-dimensional love, which is the echo of God's life within us, is the light brightly visible to all the world.

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