

*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17*

## Father's Day Edition

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**STRENGTH DOES NOT COME  
FROM WINNING.  
YOUR STRUGGLES DEVELOP  
YOUR STRENGTHS.  
WHEN YOU GO THROUGH  
HARDSHIPS  
AND DECIDE  
NOT TO SURRENDER, THAT IS  
STRENGTH.**

## 20 Ways to be a Better Dad

1. Heap lavish amounts of praise on your kids.
2. Focus on the positive when speaking to your children instead of always looking at the negative.
3. Say I love you. A lot.
4. Don't be afraid to show your emotions to your kids.
5. Listen to your kids with all of your attention.
6. Admit you're wrong when you are.
7. Forgive your own dad for any grudges you hold against him.
8. Teach a new dad what you've learned from being a dad.
9. Remember what you hated to hear from your parents as a kid and vow to be different.
10. Read out loud to your children.
11. Don't dump on your kids because you had a rough day.
12. Open a savings account for your child.
13. Once in a while, ask your kids what you can do better. Then do it better.
14. Write letters to your kids letting them know how much you love them.
15. Read a book about fatherhood.
16. Write a book about fatherhood.
17. Let them hear you respect their mother.
18. Take the time to really explain things to your children. Don't just say "because I said so."
19. Don't gossip around your kids.
20. Tell your children why they mean so much to you.



## Jonah BY PASTOR MIKE HERNANDEZ, CHURCH OF THE HARVEST

Have you ever tried to run from God? I'm pretty sure we have all tried. Maybe some of you are still running. This month we will look at one of the most famous stories of the Bible, Jonah and the Big Fish. We will see what happened to Jonah when he ran from God.

Jonah was a prophet who lived in Israel. He lived in the time of King Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25) which meant he lived 25-50 years before the fall of Israel (around 722 BC). At the time, Assyria was the most powerful nation in the world and was the enemy of Israel. The capital of Assyria was a large city called Ninevah.

God gave Jonah specific instructions – go to Ninevah and call out against it. Instead of obeying, Jonah bought a boat ticket to Tarshish. *Jonah 1:1-3*. Jonah lived in Israel. Ninevah is 500 miles east of Israel. Can you guess which direction Tarshish is from Israel? You got it, West. Tarshish is actually a city in the southern part of Spain, over 2500 miles west. Jonah was trying to run as far away from Ninevah as he could. But notice what the Bible says – Jonah was running away from the presence of the Lord.

*But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. – Jonah 1:4*

While Jonah slept in the lowest part of the boat, the sailors were fighting against the storm. The sailors were throwing cargo over and crying out to their gods. When they found Jonah sleeping, they woke him and implored him to cry out to his gods. They then cast lots to see who was at fault. The lot fell on Jonah so they asked him why this trouble has come upon them and what they could do about it (*Jonah 1:5-11*).

*He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." – Jonah 1:12*

Jonah knew he was running from God. Jonah knew that the storm was because of him. Jonah knew that if he got off the boat, the storm would stop. Yet, Jonah was not going to jump off the boat himself. He told the men to throw him overboard.

*So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. – Jonah 1:15*

Jonah didn't put up a fight when the men threw him overboard. He literally wanted the men to throw him overboard. He was so focused on himself that he wasn't willing to voluntarily jump to save the crew, he wanted the men to kill him. Maybe he thought he would be a sacrifice for the men if they threw him overboard. Maybe he thought God would hold the men accountable if they threw him overboard. We don't know why he wouldn't jump; we just know he wouldn't jump.

*And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. – Jonah 1:17*

This is an amazing miracle. Jonah lived within the belly of a fish for three days and three nights. Sometimes God goes to extreme measures to get our attention. Jonah was running from God, ready to die instead of repenting, yet God sent a fish to save his life. In the belly of the whale, Jonah repented and got right with God (*Jonah 2:1-9*).

*And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. – Jonah 2:10*

**Cont.** Jonah got a second chance. How many of you are running from God? I know many of you reading this right now have grandmas and moms who are at this moment on their knees praying for you. You are running from God. So here is the question, who will outlast who? Will you continue to run from God and outlast your praying grandma or praying mom? I don't think so. Your praying grandma and praying mom are more tenacious in their prayers than you are in your stubbornness.

I am a result of a praying grandma and praying mom. Even though I grew up in church, I didn't serve the Lord in high school. However, I had a deep conviction of sin, which I knew came from the prayers of my grandma and mom. In my freshman year in college, the Lord spoke to me through one of my friends after church. He said something along the lines, "You know Mike, you probably shouldn't go out partying on Saturday nights and go to church on Sunday mornings". In that moment, I knew God was saying to me, "choose today whom you will serve" and I stopped running from God. I haven't looked back since.

I believe some of you are at that same crossroads – "choose today whom you will serve". If you want to stop running from God, ask God to forgive you of your sins and make Jesus the Lord of your life. Reach out to Growth Ministries and they will be able to get you some tools to help you with your new walk of faith.

Jonah got a second chance. This time, when God told him to go to Ninevah, he obeyed. Jonah proclaimed destruction upon Ninevah and the city repented. Even the king took part of the fasting and putting on sackcloth. This was a city of over 100,000 people and they all repented! What a miracle! What a revival!

*When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. – Jonah 3:10*

How do you think Jonah would respond to this? His life was just saved even though he was thrown into the sea in the midst of a storm. He lived three days in the belly of a fish. God gave him a second chance and when he obeyed God, the city repented and God didn't destroy the city.

So Jonah became angry. *Jonah 4:1-3* What? He just saw a miracle of over 100,000 people repenting and he became angry? And now he wants to die? This is crazy! What is going on inside of Jonah? Let's throw out some ideas. Remember, Ninevah was a wicked city and the capital of the Assyrians, the enemy of Israel. Maybe Jonah was hopeful that God would wipe out Ninevah and he ran away from God so the city wouldn't have a chance to repent. Maybe he was thinking by sacrificing himself, then he would be destroying the enemy. But if that was the case, wouldn't he have voluntarily jumped off the boat when it was in the midst of a storm? Maybe he felt like the city was so sinful that it shouldn't have the chance to repent. We don't exactly know why he was angry; we just know he was angry.

God calls him on his anger. He answers by growing a plant to give Jonah shade then destroying that plant (*Jonah 4:5-8*). This made Jonah even more angry because the plant died. *Jonah 4:9-11*

I am thankful for the God's mercy. He was patient with Jonah. He was patient with Jonah when he ran away. He was patient with Jonah when he wouldn't jump off the ship. He was patient with Jonah for three days while he was in the belly of the fish. He was patient with Jonah when he got upset over the city repenting. He was patient with Jonah when he got upset over the plant dying. I am thankful that he is also patient with me when I act like Jonah and make stupid decision. God is also patient with you.



## Eve BY JANEL HERNANDEZ, CHURCH OF THE HARVEST

Pastor Mike has been writing some great articles about the men in the Bible. As his wife, he asked me to write some articles about the women in the Bible, and I have decided to write the first one about Eve. She is the first woman in the Bible and her story is found in Genesis 2 and 3. After reading about Eve, I believe that there are many things we can learn from her.

The first thing we can learn from Eve is that she was created to be Adam's helper. God saw that Adam was alone and he needed a helper comparable to him (Gen 2:18). God first brought all the animals to Adam to name and see if any of them could become that helper for him, but none of them were comparable (Gen 2:20). So, God took one of Adam's ribs and created Eve. If God had taken from his head, she would have been above Adam, or if from his foot, she would have been below Adam. By taking the rib from Adam, God took from his side meaning that Eve is equal to Adam. This is important to know that women are equals to men as that is how God created women.

A helper is someone who comes to the aid of someone else. This means to give help, support or assistance to someone. Women are to be that person for their husbands. We are to be there for them, support them and help them. I try to treat my husband like he is a king. Not that he is better than me, but that he feels valued, cherished, supported and taken care of. And when I do, he also wants to treat me like a queen and I feel valued, cherished, supported and taken care of as well.

God told Adam that he could eat from any tree in the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17). Eve knew God had told them not to eat of this one tree (Gen 3:2-3), but the serpent was very convincing, and Eve listened to the serpent (Gen 3:1-5). How many times in our lives do we hear the wrong voices speak to us and we listen to those voices? Another thing we can learn from Eve is that we need to listen, hear and obey the voice of God, not the voice of the enemy. To know the voice of God, we need to be in His Word and prayer daily and we need to listen for His voice. We will not know His voice if we do not spend time with Him. The more time I spend with God, the more I recognize His voice over the other voices in my head. I find freedom and peace when I know that I am hearing from God and obeying what He wants for me.

Not only did Eve listen to the serpent, but she was persuaded to eat the fruit that God had told her and Adam not to eat (Gen 3:6). The serpent manipulated her by telling her that she won't die; rather, she would become like God. She believed what the serpent said and ate the fruit and gave some to Adam and he ate it. Is it possible that the serpent manipulated both of them? Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden. They knew God and still they were easily swayed. How much more are we easily swayed from our beliefs and convictions? We need to be strong in our faith to be able to fight against the attacks that the enemy throws at us daily. "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one" (Eph 6:16). To stop the enemy we need more faith, to have more faith we need more of God, to have more of God we need to spend time with Him.

After eating the fruit, Adam and Eve covered themselves and hid from God (Gen 3:7-8). This is when sin entered into the world, and I believe this was when self-awareness entered into the world as well. Up until this point, they had not noticed themselves or that they were naked. They probably had not even thought of themselves yet, but now they did

**Cont.** and what they saw in themselves made them hide. Why did they hide? Shame, guilt, self-awareness, doubt, fear? Yes, I believe all of these and more feelings came since sin was now in the world. I cannot imagine what that must have been like to go from a life without sin to having sin in an instant. There must have been a lot of thoughts and emotions going through them at that time. God knows everything. He knew what they had done and where they were, but they hid none the less. Why do we hide from God? Shame, guilt, fear, doubt, hurt, etc. All the same reasons that Adam and Eve hid. Why do we think He doesn't know everything? As long as we are vulnerable and transparent with God, He will always be faithful to be with us and help us. We do not need to hide from God, we need to draw near to Him. "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

When God asked Adam if he had eaten from the tree, Adam blamed Eve. When God asked Eve, she blamed the serpent (Gen 3:11-13). They both put the blame on someone else and did not admit that they had sinned, nor did they repent from their sin and run back to God. How often do we do the same when we sin and blame others and run from God instead of running to God? We are human, we are not perfect, we will sin, but how do we react when we do sin? That is when our character shows. Do we blame others? Do we hide our sin from others and from God? Or do we take the blame and run to God and repent of our sin? That is how we are to show our faithfulness and commitment to God, by admitting that we have sinned and repenting to God so we do not sin anymore. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). God wants to forgive us and bring us back in right relationship with Him.

There are consequences when we sin. These were Eve's consequences to her sin: she will have pain in childbirth, her desire will be for her husband and her husband will rule over her (Gen 3:16). A lot of the time we believe we can just repent and everything is going to be just fine. Sometimes that is the case, but sometimes we have consequences to our sins and we have to remember that that is a possibility. God is a just God. Another consequence for Adam and Eve was that they were banished from the garden and had to learn to live on their own (Gen 3:23-24). I cannot image how hard that would have been as they were living in Paradise and God took care of all their needs. The biggest consequence to their sin was that they were now separated from God. They were used to walking with God in the garden and now they no longer would have that privilege. What a sad day. I wonder how much regret they lived with from that day on.

One thing that I think is amazing is that after all that Adam and Eve did, God still took care of them. "And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins and clothed them" (Gen 3:21). God made them clothes before He sent them out of the garden. Did He need to do that? No, I don't believe so. This shows that God still loves us and cares for us even when we sin. That is comforting to me, that even when I mess up, He still loves me and takes care of me.

Some things we can learn from the life of Eve are: women were created to be equal to men and the helper of men, to listen and obey the voice of God not the voice of the enemy, to have more faith so we do not fall for the enemies lies and manipulations, to be vulnerable with God not hide from Him, to not blame others but ask for forgiveness for our sins, understand that there are consequences to our sins, and be thankful that God still loves and cares for us. God wants us to walk in a right relationship with Him, but to do that we need to deal with the sin in our lives and work on our relationship with Him.



## Follow Your Heart BY BEVERLY BROWN, GMI VOLUNTEER WRITER

In the Bible, I Kings 13:7-24 tells of a prophet of God who visited the king of Judah. After a series of events, the king tried to convince the prophet to come to his home so he could reward the prophet.

The prophet adamantly refused. He told the king that even if the king were to give him half his house, the prophet would not go there nor would he eat or drink there. The prophet said the Lord had distinctly told him not to eat or drink anything, nor return home the way he came.

So he started home a different way than he came.

On that prophet's way home, an older prophet heard about him. The older prophet went in search of the young prophet and found him.

The older prophet verified the younger prophet was the one who had just come from Judah. The older prophet asked the younger prophet to come home and eat with him.

The younger prophet told the older prophet exactly what he had told the king—that he could not go with him because the Lord had specifically told him not to eat or drink anything and to go home by a different route.

The older prophet told the younger prophet that he too was a prophet and that the Lord had told him to bring the younger prophet back to his home to eat and drink. The older prophet lied.

Out of respect and regard for the age and position of the elder prophet, the younger prophet went with him and ate bread and drank water.

The story doesn't end well for the younger prophet. Because he disobeyed what the Lord had told him, a lion attacked him on his way home.

You may be wondering why I've told you this story. The reason is this; sometimes when God tells us something, others whom we trust tell us something different than what we feel the Lord has told us.

That person might be a person we love and respect, or even someone we hold in high esteem. It might be someone in a position of authority. Because we do have regard for that person and their position of authority, it is sometimes easy for us to doubt ourselves and what we feel we heard. It is easy to be swayed by them because they are Christians too.

I strongly suggest you listen to counsel from more mature Christians. It is always good to consider and pray about what they say.

However, when you feel the Lord has told you something or even if you feel in your heart there is something you should or should not do, do not be easily influenced to do something different.

**Examine your heart. Check your intents and motives.** Is it something you feel deep within you should do or should not do? If so, hold firm to your conviction. Trust yourself.

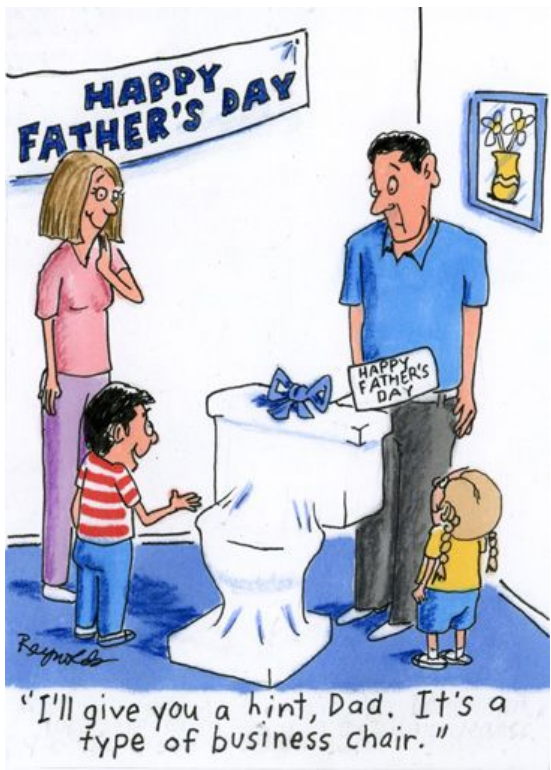
Remember--no one is perfect. The person advising you might have the best of intentions. Or, as with the older the prophet, they might have an ulterior motive. Either way they may give you unwise advice.

I am not saying to be so stubborn you don't listen to reason or to what another person says. Weigh what they say compared to how you feel. If there is something deep within you that tells you what you feel is right, then hold fast to that.

Each day is a gift. Hold firm to your convictions.

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Things that make you go Hmmmmm and Giggle...



**Johnny's father:** Let me see your report card.

**Johnny:** I don't have it.

**Johnny's father:** Why not?

**Johnny:** My friend just borrowed it. He wants to scare his parents.

**Pee Wee:** What do you call your dad when he falls through the ice?

**Westy:** Beats me.

**Pee Wee:** A POPSicle!

Being a great father is like shaving. No matter how good you shaved today, you have to do it again tomorrow.

**Bob:** How do you like the drum set you got for your birthday?

**David:** I love it!

**Bob:** Why?

**David:** Whenever I don't play it, my dad gives me 10 bucks!

**Dad:** How do you like fourth grade?

**Son:** It isn't much fun.

**Dad:** That's too bad. It was the best three years of my life!

**Dan:** I made a bad mistake today and gave my dad some soap flakes instead of corn flakes for breakfast.

**Jan:** Was he mad?

**Dan:** Yup. He was foaming at the mouth!

# Books of the Bible

J	E	R	E	M	I	A	H	J	S	H	A	D	A
E	L	A	M	E	N	T	A	T	I	O	N	S	I
R	E	V	E	L	A	T	I	O	N	A	N	J	A
S	E	E	O	A	J	O	N	A	H	T	W	O	S
M	P	Z	L	J	M	A	T	H	E	W	G	B	H
E	S	E	D	W	J	O	S	H	U	A	E	S	S
S	A	K	S	Z	S	U	A	L	E	I	N	A	D
N	L	I	S	K	R	A	M	A	E	O	I	N	H
U	M	E	P	E	S	R	E	X	T	S	E	L	U
M	S	L	E	J	U	O	O	O	A	P	U	R	N
B	W	N	T	E	O	D	S	I	R	K	R	E	S
E	A	A	E	R	U	H	A	S	E	G	D	U	J
R	N	E	R	S	S	H	N	O	T	U	S	A	J
S	G	E	N	E	S	I	S	N	A	M	O	R	S

- ROMANS
- ISAIAH
- PETER
- EXODUS
- LUKE
- MARK
- REVELATION
- JONAH
- JOSHUA
- JUDGES
- PSALMS
- JEREMIAH
- LAMENTATIONS
- DANIEL
- NUMBERS
- GENESIS
- EZEKIEL
- JOB
- MATHEW
- JOHN



## Words to Grow By

LINDA LEWIS, GMI DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

### Hang on In There!

When we're going through difficulty  
And wondering where God is,  
Remember that a Teacher is always quiet during the test.

We must ALWAYS remember  
**God has a reason**  
for allowing things to happen.  
We may never understand His wisdom,  
But we simply have to trust His will.

Trust in the Lord  
With all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding. *Proverbs 3:5*

God's got this! God's got you!



## Closing Words LONNIE JOHNSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GROWTH MINISTRIES INC



### Trading Places

In the 1980's movie "Trading Places", a rich upper crust executive pays the price for a crime he did not commit, and a lowly street hustler takes his place in high society. What if that could happen to you?

We can all agree that Jesus is the perfect role model of the highest standard of living. And if I were a betting man, I would be willing to bet that not one of us would say we come close to how holy, righteous, and perfect He is. To be honest, if anyone were to ask if you would trade places with Him, we would instantly feel inadequate.

When God created mankind, He intended for us to live in a harmonious and right relationship with Him. We kind of messed that up real quick, in the garden, and things went south. But God knowing that we could foul things up had a fix already in place. That fix was His perfect, holy and righteous son.

The bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV: **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** "When we messed it up in the Garden of Eden, our sin put a great divide between us and God. So God acted out of His love, to make it possible to remove the separation between us and Him: our sin. To accomplish this, God made Christ, who had never sinned during His life on earth in any way, to become our sin. Jesus' death, then, paid the price for our sin, removing our guilt and removing the obstacle between us and God. Instead of "being sin" ourselves, those who come to God through faith in Christ are given credit for Christ's righteous, sinless life. We "become God's righteousness" and are reconciled in our relationship with Him. Jesus traded places with us so we could stand before God the same way he does.

Jesus took on all our sins. Our past sins, current sins, and even the ones we will commit in the future. Mine, yours and everyone else who has ever existed and will ever exist. That is a lot of sin. So you don't have to carry around the guilt of what you have done, doing now, or were planning on doing after you allow Christ into your heart. The bible actually says in Romans 8:1, NIV: **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus".**

Now that you know how God sees you, walk confidently into the presence of God. Thank Him for his love. Ask of Him anything you desire, in Jesus name. Know that He loves you more than you can imagine. Live like you are the son of a Great King that rules the universe. Don't let Jesus' death go to waste. He took your place on the cross so you can stand in the presence of God like He does. Aren't you glad He traded places with you?

### Write Us



**We would love to hear from you. If you have a testimony, a prayer request or a question about your walk with the Lord, send us a letter. We would love to pray or rejoice with you. Maybe you are a writer and you have a spiritual word of encouragement for the readers of our newsletter. We would love to review your article to see if we can use it in our newsletter. We also like to share poems from you more artistic sisters and brothers.**

## What must I do to be saved?

If you've never accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, or if you've turned away from Him for a life of unrighteousness, then take a moment and say this prayer:

**“Lord, I confess that I am a sinner and ask for your forgiveness. I believe that your son Jesus died on the cross for my sins and was resurrected with all power. I invite Jesus to be the Lord of my life and your Holy Spirit to come into my heart to guide me for the rest of my days. Amen.”**



*Romans 10:9 says that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

If this is you, please write Growth Ministries and we will gladly help you start your new life in Christ.

**Growth Ministries, Inc., Attn: Executive Secretary, P.O. Box 4375, Olathe, KS 66063**



## Letters to Dad

*This is a special section highlighting letters written by some of our volunteers. We hope that you are able to find something in each letter that will give you a hint on how to be a good father, a good father figure to someone else, or how to treat your dad.*

Dear Dad,

I first want to tell you just how amazing you are! I could not have asked God for a better example of Christ than you. Even though we had no knowledge of our kinship in the earliest years of my life, we've known each other since I was born.

Prior to knowing you were my dad, I admired you for many reasons:

- You are unapologetically you – you have this quirky sense of being that you aren't ashamed of. Yes, you are different from others, but you completely accept that about yourself.
- You love God with all your heart and show it, even at a young age – I had never seen anyone in their twenties so on fire for God in both actions and words until I saw you. You drew all of us teenagers to you and as a result, to Christ.
- You have this amazing sense of humor and know how to turn it off when needed – even when you preach or teach, you include humor in your lessons or sermons. You bring so much light and understanding to God's Word and it shows that you study. You consistently turn my tears to laughter. You are why I love to laugh so much today.
- You love family and staying connected to those around you – you reach out to us when you think about us; whether it's a text, call, or message in a bottle. 😊
- You are a wonderful listener – you literally never judge or condemn us for what we tell you. At the same time, you share the truth of our situations and actions with love and care. I'm getting choked up right now just thinking about the many talks we've had. You are never afraid to tell me when I'm wrong, but I never feel hopeless when you do.
- You hug with purpose – your hugs remind me of Grandma's. She gave very tight, take the wind out of you, hugs! But no one ever questioned her love. No one ever questions your love either. Your hugs make me feel protected, loved, cared for, and respected.
- You are faithful – you've been married to the same woman for at least 30 years. You still treat her today like you did when you first grew to love her.

Dad, I respect you for all of this and more. I honor you and the life that you consistently live. I thank God for giving me a father with great character who admits his mistakes and works to never make them again. I know you aren't perfect, but you are perfectly positioned in my life to help me be a better woman, a better Christian, and a better parent.

I LOVE YOU!  
Happy Father's Day

Your firstborn,  
*Ebby*

Dear Dad,

Is that okay? Should I call you Dad, Daddy...Father? I've often wondered which I would call you. For all intent and purposes, I may switch it up as I often do. I love you and miss you. Sounds weird, huh? How can one love and miss one they've never met? Well, it happens and it's possible. This is one of many letters on the tablet of my heart.

Dear Daddy, I searched for you to walk me to school, read me a bedtime story, teach me my ABC's, and to tie my shoes. Daddy, there was some bullying going on and I prayed you would come and protect me. Then Daddy, it was that one thing that occurred...the thing we aren't supposed to talk about. Daddy, I waited for you to teach me how to count money and ride my bicycle.

Dear Dad, I waited for you today, it's my birthday and someone said you are coming. So I refuse to eat cake, because I want to eat cake with you...I've never eaten cake with you before, do you like cake? Dad, things are changing, I need your guidance, your instructions, and structure. Dad, I need you to affirm me. Dad, I need to know where I fit in, where do I belong? Dad, I need to hear I am smart, pretty, and will become someone great.

Dear Father, time is moving, and I still haven't heard from you. Are you looking for me? Do you like me? Are you proud of me? Am I like you? Dear Father, do I look like you? Act like you? What do we have in common? Dear Father, I needed you for my first dance, my first love, and my first heartbreak.

Dear Robert, I hope this letter finds you and your family well. Just wanted to let you know I am okay. I learned all the things I needed to learn, and some bonus life lessons, as well. I finally got over that one thing. Most of my scars, mostly, are all healed. Mom died. I am no longer afraid of the dark. I drive pretty good. Turns out I am smart, and I have a good heart. I am saved, I invited Jesus Christ into my life, God has accepted me as a daughter, who knew, I am a daughter.

Dear Robert, thank you for giving me life. Thank you for doing the very best you could do in your circumstance.

Dear Robert, I am sorry to hear you died. If we happen to be in the same section of Heaven, look for me, because I'll always be looking for you.

*E. Butler*

Hello Dad,

I wanted to take a moment to let you know how I am doing. I am all grown up now. I have a family; a good job and I am active in my church. I think you would be proud of what I have become.

But everything has not always been good for me Dad. I became a criminal at age 8 by shoplifting at the grocery store when I would go with Mom. That led to me breaking in homes, embezzling from banks, stealing people's identity, and taking anything that was not nailed down when I thought I could get away with it.

I also started smoking cigarettes at age 10 and getting high at 12. This led to a long period of getting high and eventually a crack addiction. That addiction only added to the stealing I was doing.

I ran the streets with drug dealers, pimps, prostitutes, drug addicts and murderers. Those are the people I called my friends.

I would like to think if you had been around more, I would not have gotten into a lot of this stuff. But I did get my first drink of beer from you, and I stole cigarettes from you because I wanted to be like you.

I do cherish the times that you did come by and hang out, even though the gaps in-between those times would be very long sometimes. I know you and Mom didn't always get along. I remember you came by on my birthday when I was little and slid an envelope with \$5 in it under the door. That was literally the happiest day of my young life when I saw that envelope. It meant so much that you remembered my birthday. I wish you could have come in and hung out.

We did have some good times when you were around. Playing catch in the backyard, going to baseball games and riding with you to your friends' house when Mom needed a break from me. I just wish there were more of those times. I loved it when people called you **Big Lon** because that meant they knew there was a **Little Lon**, which was me.

When you passed away, I was just becoming a man. I was so proud that you left all your worldly possessions to me in your will.

I have a son now. You don't know this, but you unintentionally taught me a very valuable lesson about fatherhood. I learned that a father has to be there for his kids more than once in a while.

I love you and still think the world of you. I am proud to be named after you. *Little Lon.*

Dear Dad,

I miss you greatly! Your laugh, your smile, our talks... I miss it. Although you have been deceased for 21 years, I hold close to my heart every year that you were in my life.

I will never forget the day you came to the school, and my teacher told me that you were in the hallway and needed to speak with me. I was in 6th grade and school was about to end in about 2 hours, and you came to tell me bye, and that you were moving back to Alabama as you and mom had made the decision to divorce. You told me that you could not leave without seeing me and telling me that you were leaving. That day was very hard for me, as you were all I knew as a father and I loved you dearly. I am so glad that you remained in my life even though we were not in the same house or state.

You were a great father and I thank God that you were in my life. You were always available and wanted me to know that you were there for me, and even though, at times, you were not able to financially support all of the things I wanted, you always reminded me that you loved me.

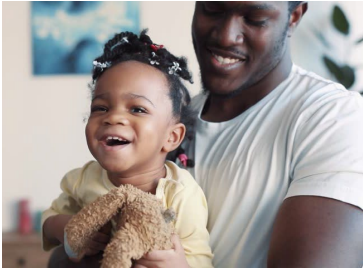
The little things you did for me are big things to me today. I appreciate all of the music tapes you use to make me and send to me we moved to Japan (with my mom and stepfather). You knew I loved music just as much as you did. Still this day I love music and I think of you every time I hear the Gap Band, Ashford & Simpson, Cameo, all the of the old school music. I remember in the summer time, when I would come visit you, you would make it a point every time you would get off work, to have that talk with me about "Boys". You knew I was getting older, but you wanted me to be aware and up on the game. You would always call and check on me at just the right time during my early years in college, and I don't know why but it was always during a time I felt overwhelmed with school work or life, and you would always calm me down with your encouraging words. Two sayings that stick with me still today are "Don't cry over spilled milk", and "You cannot save the world". I often time still hear you telling me that.

Dad, you were a great guy. Although you made some mistakes with my mother, I never heard her say anything negative about the man she married. As a matter of fact, you taught me by showing me that blended families can work by respecting one another. You showed me that it does not have to be hard. I will never forget the day that I saw you talking to my stepfather and you shook his hand and said, "Thank You", "Thank You for taking great care of my kids (because it was 3 of us)". I know that had to be hard for you as a man, but you made it look so easy and I knew it came from your heart. I have never forgotten that moment, as that was another moment, that has shaped my life today, as I married a man with kids.

Dad, thank you for being the best father you knew how to be. I miss you and love you greatly.

Love,

*Your Eldest Daughter*



## DADDY'S GIRL

*"Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding.*

*I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching."*

-Proverbs 4:1-2 (NIV)

I'm a "daddy's girl." Even though I'm a grown woman with my own child, I will always be a daddy's girl.

For as long as I can remember, my father has served as a pillar of strength, discipline, stability, with a good measure of "take no mess." He was my first example of what *security* looks like.

More importantly, he provided a continuous example of what I should *feel*, while in the presence of a strong man who takes care and responsibility for his family.

I remember many lessons my father taught me, both with his words and with his silence. Fathers have this amazing way of keeping order in the home, without saying one single word.

When I was a little girl, I remember my father teaching me the correct way to clean the dishes: a capful of bleach in the wash water, and ALWAYS warm or hot water to rinse. He taught me how to REALLY clean the kitchen. I can hear him saying: *"Clean the house as if they are coming to inspect quarters."*

To this very day, I strive to keep my home – and life - clean and orderly as he taught me. His instruction was invaluable.

As I reflect on this upcoming Father's Day, I realize how blessed I am to have an upbringing that my

father provided for me. And I realize that, to have my father still on this earth with me, is a blessing all by itself.

To me, there are three words I believe all fathers and father figures represent: *stability, consistency, and wisdom.*

My life has taken many twists and turns, but I can say with certainty that the *stability* of my father's words are always with me, no matter the situation. I can test his advisement against any challenge I happen to be facing. His words always ring true.

The *consistency* of his actions serves as my model, when I think I can "freestyle" something in life that was meant to stay stable. Taking care of business, making worthwhile decisions, and creating a life for yourself is something you do, whether you feel like it or not. My father's actions taught me that.

His *wisdom* is what continues to carry me in my adult years. When life smacks me upside the head, I hear my father's voice reminding me of where I went wrong.

For those of you who are fathers or father figures, never forget what you represent. Your circumstances do not diminish your role as a father. You have different wisdom and reflections to share with the community, and we still call you "Baba."

Your *stability, consistency, and wisdom* – even in your hour of struggle, pain, and uncertainty – is a valid teaching and guidance tool to the community's children.

From this daddy's girl to all of you: Happy Father's Day. You are loved, respected and cherished.

*Lisa Henry*