



Scripture: Psalm 25:4-5, Ps. 31:3

Have you ever just looked at your life and thought, “How did I get here?” After 6 years of marriage and two beautiful babies, I have thought that numerous times. Hang with me here! At times, it was positive. I’ve looked at my husband and thought, “Wow, he’s amazing. Why in the world did he choose me?” Then, there are the times when that thought hasn’t had a positive connotation. When our daughter was born five weeks premature, I was constantly second guessing myself during our stay in the hospital and the weeks after we brought her home. I thought, “I did everything right! What could I have done differently so she would have been born healthy?”

Too often, we think of the negative sides of these questions: Where is this path taking me? What is the purpose of my life? Why did this goal or dream not work out? Why, Why, Why? When reflecting back upon both of these Psalms, a song comes to mind by Sanctus Real:

So Father, give me the strength
 To be everything I’m called to be
 Oh, Father, show me the way
 To lead them
 Won’t you lead me?

I think instead of asking the Father, “How did I get here?” The right question would be “Will you lead me?” Psalm 25:4-5 says “[...] Lead me in your truth and teach me [...].” Teach me Lord! Show me how you want me to live my life! Just as a child learns from those closest to him, we too can learn from the Father if when we draw near to Him.

As a child, I shoveled manure, shucked corn and dug potatoes on my grandparents’ farm. I certainly learned to not be afraid of getting dirty! I think the Father teaches us a similar lesson in our spiritual lives. Our lives are not easy. They are indeed work, and the work can be dirty and sweaty. Our relationship with Christ is work. We are judged, taunted, and ostracized for our relationship. These obstacles are all in a day’s work as a disciple. God teaches us that if we put in the work, if we have faith, we will reap the rewards.

What would our lives look like if we weren’t afraid of the work? What would our lives look like if we said “Teach me. Lead me.”? I know if I lived this every day, my life and heart would change for the better. Using God’s example I would forgive more easily and love more deeply. I would stress less and see the good in people first.

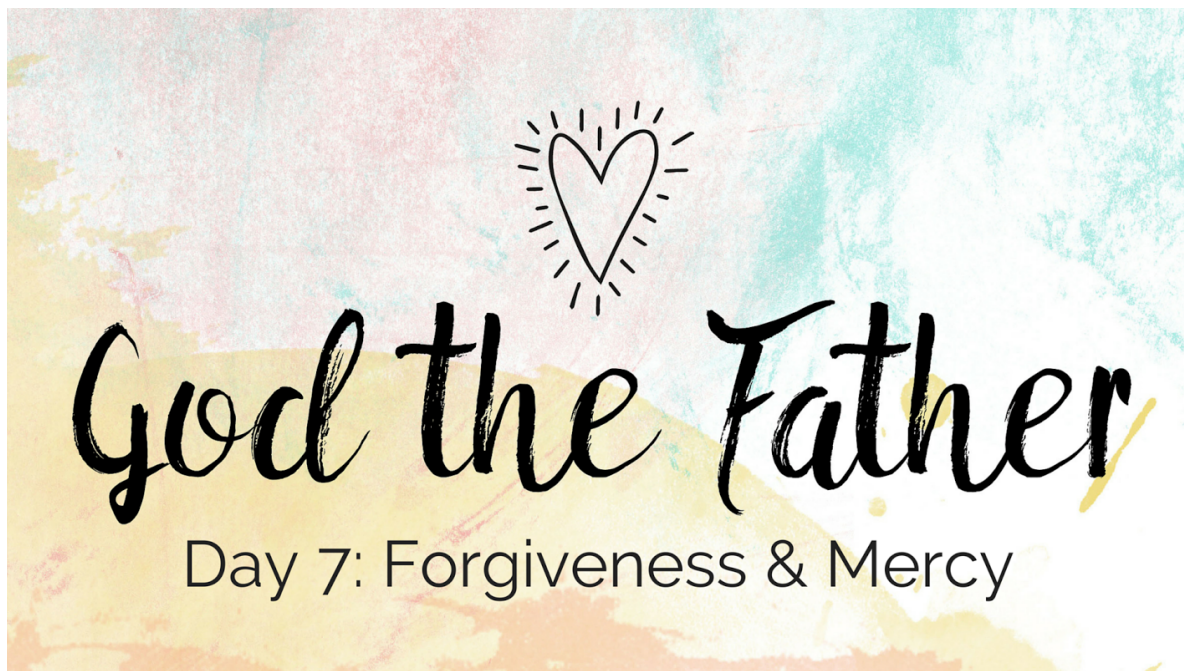
Let your heavenly Father lead you through your journey. Let Him show you the path that He has so thoughtfully and lovingly laid out for you. Learn from His example and apply those hard learned lessons every chance you get.

- Ashley

Reflection: What do you think of the path that your life is on right now?

Reflection: Do your plans for the future include the Lord?

Act: Think back on your last week. What lessons has the Lord been trying teach you through your daily experiences? Patience, love, diligence? Attempt to apply those lessons to your daily actions going forward.



Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:3, Matthew 6:14

Have you ever come home late for curfew? (Who me? Never!) Have you ever brought home a guy your parents didn't approve of? (Again, moi? No!) You know that sick feeling you get when you know you've done something wrong? Or worse yet, that look on your dad's face when you know that he knows that you REALLY messed up? I've always found that I can't seem to hide my shortcomings and failures from my parents, especially my dad - he's sneaky like that. Like the time I was speeding, hit a patch of dirt, and spun into a field barely missing a giant pole. Just when I thought I'd gotten away with my little death defying secret, my dad noticed the grass and mud plastered on the inside of my wheel well later that day. I attempted to lie, but that didn't go as planned either. Busted. Lucky for me, my dad was quick to forgive.

Pope Francis reminds us that "Jesus Christ reveals the face of the Father's mercy." Even when we don't deserve it, we can still find forgiveness through the Father. Just as my dad forgave me for my crazy actions, God too forgives us. If Jesus is a true reflection of God (which He is) we can see time and again where Jesus extended mercy to those who didn't deserve it. Jesus was merciful and forgave prostitutes and tax collectors. He healed lepers! Just as God, through Jesus, has forgiven the sinners and the lepers, you too can experience that type of forgiveness from the Father.

I also want to reflect upon God sending Jesus into the world as an infant. God had the power to send Jesus down as a mighty king. He could have been the leader of an expansive army and dominated the lands. Instead, He was sent to us as a helpless baby. To me, that says a lot about God as a father. God shows that he is nurturing, kind and tender by sending Jesus to us as an infant. 2 Corinthians 1:3 backs this up, describing God as the "Father of compassion and God of all encouragement."



Scripture: 1 Peter 2:2, Isaiah 25:6

When was the last time you ate a really good meal? For me a meal not only includes great food, but time to relax and good company. I heard the saying “You should eat to live, not live to eat” a lot while swimming competitively, but man do I love to eat! After a really good family meal, I feel not only physically satiated, but emotionally as well. The meal itself doesn’t have to be fancy. Paper plates and red solo cups will work just as well as fine china. What can’t be replaced though is my dad’s funny laugh, the scent my grandma leaves when she hugs me, the cry of the baby during prayer. These are what make a really great meal.

While we eat as a family nearly every evening, a lot of times it’s rushed and meal prep can be stressful with so many people clamoring for different things in the kitchen. Our “special” family meals typically happen on a Friday or Saturday and really help heal me after a long, stressful week. God the Father wants to share special meals like this with us as well. He literally wants to feed our souls. Much like good conversation and good food can heal an emotionally difficult week, God can heal our souls with, you guessed it, soul food.

But what does soul food look like? Just like everyone has a different favorite meal, soul food is going to look different for each person. Perhaps seeing the sun set on your way home from work inspires you. Or, maybe it’s finally hearing the words “I love you” from your child. It could be a well-timed hug from a friend, or a nice long telephone call with your mom. Whatever your soul food looks like, God is behind it. He paints the sky; He literally makes your kids. He whispers to your friend, “She needs a hug.” He tells

you, "Go call your momma." Whatever soul food is for you, give thanks for it and savor it. Feed your soul with His love and strength.

When I had originally thought of this post, my first thought was of my son saying "Um, mommy, I'm hungry." Or my favorite (not), "Mommy, I need a snack...now!" At first I thought it was just something funny that didn't really have a place in my post. But then I began to think of my response to him, "You'll ruin your dinner if you eat those cookies." "You'll have to wait until I'm done fixing breakfast/lunch/dinner to eat. You don't need a snack right now." This got me thinking. Do we "snack" in our spiritual lives? Do we fill up on junk and not leave room for the Father to fix a really nice meal for us? I know I do. I get so caught up with work, and all of my responsibilities, that I don't take the time to savor the wonderful meals God has prepared for me. Mass on Sunday? Rush to get the kids dressed, rush to get there on time, rush out to get lunch made and kids in bed for their naps. Rush, Rush, Rush. Did I take time to savor mass, or was I distracted by my responsibilities? Unfortunately, this happens more than I would like to admit.

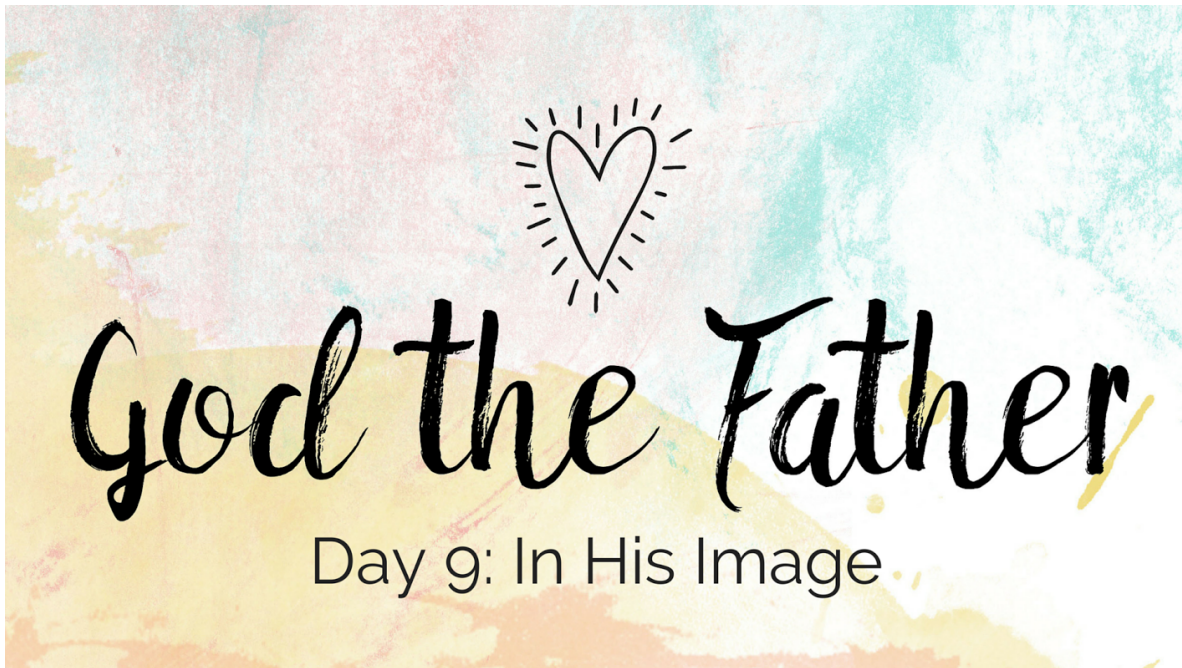
I can't help but feel as though my spiritual life, and my relationship with the Father would be so much richer if I took the time to not only eat, but savor the feast He has set out before me. I think the primary way we can achieve this is to stop snacking and filling our lives up with junk. God has the ability to fill us up, just like a good meal can. I think we should definitely take Him up on this, and make a standing reservation.

- Ashley

Reflection: When was the last time you had a good meal? What elements made it good?

Reflection: What kind of junk gets in the way of feasting on what God has to offer?

Act: Call a friend or family member and check in on them. Perhaps God can feed their soul through your kind words.



Scripture: Genesis 1:27, Matthew 6:6

Do you have someone that you look up to? That, if given the chance, you would like to become just like them? Or, do you have a parent that - purposefully or not - you have become them? I have several strong women, including my beautiful mother, that I look up to and attempt to emulate. But I have become my father.

You know that funny meme online? The one that says “I opened my mouth and my mother came out!” That happens to me a lot, except my dad comes out. It’s not a bad thing by any stretch of the imagination! We both love the same things: good food, scary movies, a fan blowing on us while we sleep. I’ve always looked up to my dad. He was, and continues to be a wonderful provider. I’ve never seen anyone work harder for his family. He is laid back, fun, and insanely smart. While we certainly have our differences, I love the fact that I resemble my father in personality and looks.

If God is our Father, shouldn’t we possess some of His personality traits? Should we, at the end of the day, look like Him? For me, it’s difficult to see God in myself, even though we know that we are created in His image. Genesis 1:27 It’s not necessarily something I can see in the mirror looking back at me every day. Some of that is because I am hard on myself and constantly think “I could be better.” The other side of that is because I’m not spending enough time with God. I’m like my dad and say some of the same things he does because of the vast amount of hours we have spent together. I can’t help but think if we were to spend more time with God we would become more like Him.

If we became more like God and spent more time with him, what would we look like? Would those around us notice a difference? I definitely think people would notice the changes in me if I were to



Scripture: Deuteronomy 1:31, Psalm 18:2

Sometimes my son has nightmares and calls out in the night for me. The fear in his voice is so palpable I break out into a cold sweat myself as I run into his room. I scoop him up and assure him everything is going to be okay. His sobs eventually subside and his sweet cherub face is at peace again. It's heartbreaking to see him so scared, and I think the quiet dark house just magnifies everything being felt on my side and on his side. It's amazing though, and really quite satisfying to hear him call out for ME. I'm the one he wants during his darkest hour. To me, this is like the ultimate gift. Right now, I get to be everything for him.

God should be who we call out to in the night. Have you ever had a terrible dream and not been able to go back to sleep? Man, I sure have. I just lay there, my heart racing trying not to fall back into the dream all over again. God should be who we wake up in the night when we are scared. He is our Father, and wants nothing more than to assuage our fears. He is strong and mighty. In Psalm 18:2 we are reminded that God is our rock and our safe haven. He can handle our greatest fears and harbor us in the scariest of moments.

Sometimes, we can be paralyzed with fear and sadness. We lose a parent or a child, we are let go from our job, we fail a class for the second time in a row. All of these things can leave us nearly incapacitated and shake our faith. In Deuteronomy 1:31, God tells us that He will carry us just like a father carries his child. This passage also reminds me of "Footprints in the Sand" a poem that chronicles the life of a man and his journey with God. When the man looks back on the difficult trials of his life, he notices only one set of footprints in the sand. He asks God, "I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there



Scripture: John 15:10, Deuteronomy 10:21

The Fourth Commandment directs us to honor our mother and father. We are instructed to be obedient and to love them with all of our heart. This commandment is in reference to our earthly parents.

However, I certainly think we can apply it to our Heavenly Father. So far, during this study, we have reflected upon God and how He can support us in our lives; How we should trust him with our problems and allow him to carry us. But one thing we haven't talked about is how we should obey Him. In John 15:10 we are reminded to keep the commandments in order maintain a close relationship with God.

It would be difficult to maintain a positive relationship with your parents if you continually broke the house rules. God has house rules too that He expects us to submit to. These rules are seen in the 10 commandments and supported throughout the bible. Some of these commandments can be really hard to abide by. Envy is the one I struggle with the most-I'm always catching myself thinking, "They have a bigger house. She always has the nicest clothes. I bet she makes more money than I do" These thoughts eat away at my self confidence relationship with God. It's difficult to stick to these rules. But, God has given us the tools we need to be successful.

In addition to obeying Him, it's also imperative that we praise Him. One of my favorite days of the year is Father's Day. I really enjoy picking out a gift for my dad and helping my son work on a gift for my husband. I have always found it fun to build someone up and make them feel special. Isn't the most special person in our life God the Father? Deuteronomy 10:21 reminds us of all of the wonderful things that God has done for us and that we should praise him for it. We devote a whole day (and I think it



Scripture: Lamentations 3:22, Psalm 86:5

Saint John Chrysostom, an early leader of the Church said, “ God loves us more than a father, mother, friend, or any else could love, and even more than we are able to loves ourselves.” For me, it’s hard to imagine a love greater than the love of my parents and spouse. For others of you, it may be difficult to fathom and love greater than that of your best friend, or sibling.

God’s love for us, just like His love for the Son is unfathomable. It’s truly a miracle in itself. Lamentations 3:22 depicts God’s love as infinite and never ceasing. Each day, every minute of our lives, God is loving us, thinking of us, and planning for us. God is, as you know, the very definition of love. No matter how many times we sin, or run away, or are just plain mean, He is there, waiting.

I can’t help but feel a little overwhelmed by the knowledge that He has claimed me as His own. In an earlier post, we reflected upon God penning our names in His heart. The very idea of God knowing my name AND calling me his daughter is humbling to say the least. I certainly do not feel worthy of the honor. But, that’s one of the reasons why I was so excited to write about this topic. I feel, as I’m sure other women do, that God can, at times, be unattainable and unreachable. By painting Him as the Father, and not “Some spirit in the sky” as Norman Greenbaum put it, we are able to get excited about our role as a child of God. We can keep God close to us all day long and bring Him with us into our darkest days.

The past few days have been all about the Father and how He has called us to be HIs. It’s scary and exciting all at the same time. Will we disappoint him from time to time? Probably so. Will we come home

