



My Three Dads

Dave Edwards

This is a story about my three dads. For most of my life, I felt as if I didn't have a dad at all. Now, I realize that God has provided father figures (including mentors) all along, including Himself. Let me tell you a little about my 3 dads and their impact on me.

In the 60's an unexpected, and unwanted, pregnancy was looked upon with scorn and shame. So, I came into this world experiencing rejection from my mom, dad, grandparents, the rest of my extended family and society. Many say that I was an illegitimate child, but now I know that there's no such thing--only illegitimate parents.



My biological father, Ray, didn't marry my mom. I believe my mom wanted to get pregnant in order to force him to marry her. Unfortunately for my mom, it didn't work because Ray didn't love her. He married another woman and never had any additional children. Despite many efforts to meet him, throughout my life, Ray chose to shut me out of his life for 46 years. In the fall of 2010, I decided to try, once again, to reach out to him. So, I sent him my testimony. A week later, there was a strong prompting to pray for Ray, and I did for three days. A month later, he called, and we talked for two hours. I told him that I didn't want anything from him and just offered the gift of resolution. I felt that he may have been stuffing emotions of guilt and shame for decades. For 21 years, Ray had to write a child support check to my mom. I know that must have been a constant reminder of the fact that he had a son, which he didn't know. I said that if I were him, I couldn't live with the fact that I knew I had a son somewhere but didn't know if he was dead or alive--a good person or a criminal. Nor, would I know what my son loved and hated, or even what he looked like. I told Ray I'd like to meet him, and my biological family, but would wait until he was ready. He said I could call him, but not every day. I responded by saying that I wasn't going to call him at all, and that the ball was now in his court. He called a month later, and for two years, we talked on the phone. I believe that God told me that I would meet him someday. My mentor, who introduced him to my mom, told me that was impossible because he was dying of leukemia. Ray was even unable to go to his mother's funeral. I clung to my belief that I would meet him one day. Then, in 2012, I went to Minneapolis for a conference and he finally agreed (and was healthy enough) to meet with me. So, at age 48, I got to see my biological father for the first time when we talked for three hours at a restaurant. Ray stated that he didn't believe I was his son, even though he had paid child support for 21 years. I think this was a self-protection mechanism to justify his actions in rejecting me. After we met, my mentor told me that he said that we really didn't connect, but I think that he really didn't want to connect with me. As a result, of this long-anticipated meeting, I left with a sense of resolution, but also more disappointment. Since then, we talked on the phone a number of times, but little came of it. Ray died in 2014 of Leukemia.



My stepdad/adoptive father, Walter, married my mom when I was six months old. He was a Vietnam veteran who experienced the horrors of war. Walter suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and health issues as a result of the war. He used alcohol to self-medicate his emotional and physical pain. His frequent violent rages, against my mom, caused a lot of trauma for me as a child. Because I was the eldest, I would be the one to call the police and try to make things better. That was an extraordinary burden for an 8-year old.

The effects of growing up as a child of an alcoholic have been many. I tend to overreact to changes I can't control, I constantly seek approval, I feel different, I am extremely loyal (even in unhealthy relationships), and I have difficulty finishing projects. Some of these things have gotten better and some I still deal with daily.

I felt my dad favored my younger brother, his namesake. I now realize that some of this was a misperception on my part. Because my parents divorced when I was young, I never had a dad to play catch with, or to run to when I was afraid, or defend me against bullies. And, I never had a dad to teach me how to become a man. Boys need three things from their fathers—**affirmation, attention and affection**, and I didn't get any of that from him. As a result, bitterness set in, and for over 20 years, I had nothing to do with my stepfather. I even refused to call him dad. Gradually, as I grew to know the Lord, I was able to forgive him and begin a relationship with him and my brother. Over time, we began to say, "I love you" and give each other a hug. That forgiveness allowed me to help reconcile my sister with him as well. What a blessing it was to be able to take my nine-year-old nephew to see his grandfather for the first time! Finally, my family was restored.

For many years I prayed about my dad's alcoholism. In 2009, he went to the hospital, after alcohol poisoning. He then went to a treatment center and then Alcoholic Anonymous meetings. He has been sober ever since. He even visited other veterans who were dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder and alcoholism. I'm so proud of him.

I learned that he had always wanted to adopt me, but my mom wouldn't let him. This caused a lot of friction in their marriage. After waiting many years for him to initiate the adoption discussion, I decided to bring it up. This, I thought, was a way to publicly acknowledge the healing that had taken place in our relationship. So, on April 18, 2011, I was formally adopted at age 48 in a courthouse in Columbus, Ohio. Dad died of cancer in 2021.



My mentors—Vern and Alan

God provided two individuals to step into the gap of my life. These two men regularly encouraged, confronted and supported me. I'm so thankful that I was able to know these incredible men. Vern was my grandmother's cousin's son. He went to college with my mom and uncle and introduced my mom to my biological father. Ray and Vern were best friends during childhood. However, their relationship soured because Vern saw how Ray was rejecting me and confronted him about it. Alan was Executive Director of a ministry in which I was involved. He spent many years building into my life both spiritually and emotionally.



My Heavenly Father, Abba

Even though I have a biological father and an adopted stepfather, I know that my true father is the "Father to the Fatherless". I have come to know what it means to have God as my father. Father God has always lovingly, and persistently, pursued me. Of all my fathers, He has been the most faithful and consistent. Growing up without a healthy father figure hindered my growth into masculinity. Abba Father is continually healing many of these deficits. He has shown Himself as a strong provider, protector and caring dad, who adores me whether I perform well or not. As I learn to be loved by Him, I am growing into the man He wants me to be. As Abba lavishly meets my needs for love and acceptance, I am able to love Him, and others, correctly and abundantly. My desire is that all of my holiness, giving, serving, loving and sharing flows from this supply of limitless love and acceptance, for I am beloved. I have learned to rely on God when I could rely on no one else. He has shown me, through promises in His Word and through my experiences with Him, that He is faithful. As I step out in trust, believing His promises, I have seen that He will encourage me, equip me, protect me, provide for me, and bless my efforts. Here are some verses which explain God's love for me:

- He is a father to the fatherless...*(and, He is a father to those who were fathered less!)* *Ps. 68:5*
- He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow. *Deut. 10:18*
- The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. *Ps. 10:14*
- The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow. *Ps. 146:9*
- He also made them objects of compassion in the presence of all their captors. *Ps. 106:46*
- I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me. *2 Cor. 6:8*
- Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God. *1 John 3:1*
- For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. *Ps. 103:11*
- For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but my lovingkindness will not be removed from you. *Is. 54:10*
- I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore, I have drawn you with lovingkindness. Again, I will build you and you shall be rebuilt. *Jer. 31:3*
- Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget but I will not forget you. Behold I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are continually before me. *Is. 49:14-16*

If you, or someone you love, is dealing with any of the issues addressed above, please feel free to reach out to me at dave@daveedwardsevents.com or 202-425-7841.