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the abandoned child

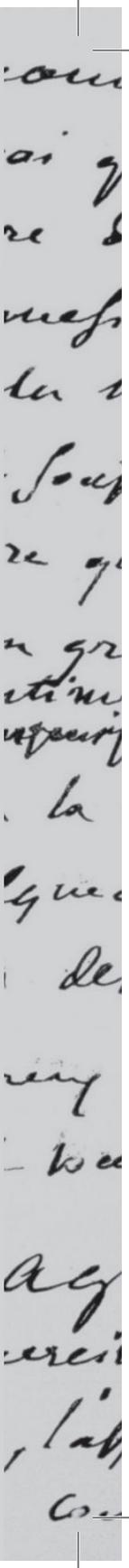
“Life, misfortunes, isolation, abandonment, poverty, are battlefields which have their heroes; obscure heroes, sometimes greater than the illustrious heroes.”

—Victor Hugo

Kathleen Maddox ran away from home when she was 15. Her mother was strict, overbearing, and cold. When Kathleen’s father would try to be affectionate toward his wife, she would push him away, telling him he was “vulgar.” After years of suffocating under her mother’s control, Kathleen had enough and ran away.

Now that she was finally free, she could do whatever she wanted. She drank too much and had promiscuous sex. When she was only 16, Kathleen found out she was pregnant. She ended up having a son who never knew his father or had a real father figure. Kathleen was a terrible mother. She would leave her son and disappear for days or weeks at a time. Eventually, she was convicted of armed robbery and was sentenced to 5 years in prison.

Her son was then sent to live with distant relatives who didn’t even really want him. His new dad called him a sissy and dressed him like a girl for his first day of school, saying he wanted to teach the little boy to act like a man.



A few years later, when Kathleen was paroled, her son came to live with her again. But she kept living her life without any concern for her young, impressionable child. She would drown herself in alcohol every day and sometimes sell her body for money to buy more. Before long she lost custody of her son. He would spend years being shuffled through reform schools. But the schools weren't any better for him—in one school, both older boys and guards sadistically sexually abused him. When he had the chance, he ran away.

At 18, he was a legal adult, so he was released into society to fend for himself. For the next 15 years, he was in and out of prison for stealing cars, pimping, and transporting prostitutes from one state to another—he also got extra time for assaulting and sodomizing other inmates.

After he was paroled, he gathered a group of about 50 college graduates, pushers, pimps, and Satanists. Over the next two years, they would see him as a mentor, lover, father figure, and even Christ-incarnate.

Together, they went on one of the most horrific crime sprees of the 20th Century. He led a chain of barbaric, highly publicized crimes, including two-dozen murders and ritualistic killings. His followers have now been in prison for over thirty years and will probably never be paroled.

Charles Milles Manson was an abandoned and rejected child born to an oppressed mother—a child who was so filled with rage that he grew up to lead a sadistic gang of other abandoned rejects to strike terror into an entire nation.

Prisons are filled with people who were abandoned or rejected by their parents. A counselor who has worked with prisoners for 25 years said he has never met a prisoner who genuinely loved his dad. He also learned that 95% of prisoners on death row hated their fathers. There's got to be a connection.

My “Prison” Years

It’s hard to imagine that Charles Manson and I had anything in common, but the truth is we did—I was also abandoned and rejected by a parent.

When we were 11, my twin brother, Joseph, and I were sent away to a Catholic boarding school. We would never again live at home. From then until I graduated high school, I lived in an oppressively strict, religious environment. We weren’t allowed to talk in the classrooms, hallways, or dormitory. There were never any caring words or guidance—no one to look to as a parent. I felt completely lost and isolated. I would see my mother when I went home on some weekends, but my father never came to the school, not even for my graduation. Being abandoned in this rigid, lifeless school system was the most crushing experience of my life. I hated every minute of it and looked for ways to rebel. Joseph and I set the record for demerits.

By the time I was 15, still in the middle of my horrible religious school experience, I decided that if there was a God, I hated His guts. Most of the time God seemed to be as absent from my life as my father, so I blamed Him equally for my miserable condition.

When I was a freshman in college, my peers reminisced about their high school experiences. They would talk about dances and parties and going home to their families every night. I realized my high school experience was anything but normal and far from right.

I had missed out on a lot, and it made me furious. I went back to my old boarding school looking for one of the leaders to punch out. I wanted to hold someone responsible for my pain—to yell at them for the

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injustice in my life. But when I got there, I found out that the boarding school had been closed down and the leaders were long gone. My graduating class had been the last year.

Great Expectations

My father gave me two personal gifts I can remember. One was a dinner menu from the Waldorf Astoria in New York City. The mayor of New York hosted a dinner to honor the original seven NASA astronauts. My dad, the head of a congressional sub-committee focusing on space exploration, was invited to the dinner. He had each astronaut autograph the menu. Above their signatures my dad wrote, "...we hope you will become one of us."

I have processed this encouraging sentence now for over forty years. Maybe he had pure motives—maybe it was just the dream of a hopeful father. But, at the time, I saw it as another of my dad's expectations I would never fulfill. It sounded like, "You know, son, I'm really counting on you to invent the cure for cancer. And if you don't, I'm going to be really, really disappointed."

When I was a teenager, I couldn't have cared less about my father's political accomplishments—I just wanted his love and acceptance. But I didn't get them, and that rejection made my anger fester into rage. I continually failed to meet his unachievable expectations. Anytime I saw him, he would interrogate me about my life until it became obvious I was an embarrassment to him.

The truth is my father was an excessively dominant and critical person, and I never lived up to his expectations of me. Ironically, I'm now convinced he never measured up to his own expectations of himself.

As far as I can remember, he had only one even remotely fatherly conversation with Joseph and me. It was during his five-year tenure as a New York State Supreme Court Justice when we were about 16. Our fireside chat lasted all of one minute. He sternly called us into his room and said, "If you have sex with a girl under 18, it's statutory rape, and you'll go to jail." That was it. No explanation, no conversation, end of discussion.

Frankly, because my dad didn't care about me, I didn't care about him, and the animosity I felt toward him lasted for years after his death.

The dean of the university I attended was my father's personal friend and had awarded him an honorary doctorate. A few years after my father died, during the Vietnam War, I led a band of anti-war protestors to take over this dean's office.

The dean wasn't there, but in the heat of rebellion, I climbed through his outside office window and audaciously sat behind his desk. Secretaries scurried and called security. My father was dead, but my hatred for him was alive and burning. In my heart it wasn't the dean's office I was desecrating—it was my father's. I was climbing through my dad's window and defiantly sitting in his chair.

He was dead, but the anger was still seething.

How many other senseless acts of violence and anger have occurred because the innocent victims reminded the perpetrators of people who hurt them? How many abandoned sons and daughters have taken retribution on someone who was just at the wrong place at the wrong time?

Goodbye For Now

My father had helped countless people during his 61 years. As I stood in line and greeted hundreds of people at his funeral, I heard story after story about his efforts on behalf of the known and unknown. So why had I, his own son, gotten so little of the love and attention he gave everyone else?

Years later my older brother told me, "Dad didn't consider you a person he could relate to until you were 18."

He died 56 days before my 18th birthday.

I will never forget the pained look on my father's face the day he died. I was home for Christmas break during my first year of college. As he left our home on that final morning, he was a tired, frustrated, embittered man. He probably died the same way, late that night, lying on the

floor of a hotel bathroom. He had grown up without a father himself, and I have to think that maybe the haunting emptiness of his own abandonment had been the deepest regret of his unfulfilled life.

Just two hours before our father's fatal heart attack, my twin brother and I cried out in tears of frustration, "I wish he would drop dead!" It hurts to say it now, but when we found out he had died, part of us was glad.

Growing up, I thought of my father as "...one of those people who would be enormously improved by death."²⁰ Now four decades later, I would give anything to see him just one more time, to say all of the things that need to be said, to ask forgiveness for my part. I'm convinced he would ask my forgiveness, too, and it's a conviction I cherish.

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My deep desire to be reconciled with both my natural and heavenly fathers is God-given. It's a passion God not only created in me, but one He desperately wants to fulfill. My heavenly Father, more than any other Person in the universe, wants to restore "...the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers..."²¹ I am committed to this being fulfilled in my life.

Abandonment Dysfunctions

When I look at some of today's famous that are fatherless, I wonder how much of their personal dysfunctional behavior can be traced back to abandonment. Could it be that moral deformity has corrupted their gifted lives because of father wounds?

Kurt Cobain, the lead singer, songwriter, and guitarist of Nirvana, grew up being shuffled around among his divorced parents, family, and friends. He said his parents' divorce made him unable to ever feel loved

or secure. He began smoking pot at 11, moved on to heroin at 19, and was addicted by 23. Cobain died tragically at 27 when he shot himself in the head, leaving behind his wife and infant daughter.

Rapper Tupac Shakur was gunned down in a drive-by shooting in 1996. His brutal death personified the violence he wrote about in his music. When asked why he was involved in drugs, shootings, and prison time, Shakur expressed his emotional abandonment stating, “I blame my father, ‘cause he left me. My real father was a Black Panther. But when I was growing up, I never knew who my real father was. My stepfather was a gangster, a straight-up street hustler. I know for a fact if I had a father, I’d have some discipline. Your mother can’t calm you down the way a man can. Your mother can’t reassure you the way a man can. Your mother can’t show you where your manhood was. You need a man to teach you how to be a man.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosopher who wrote, “God is dead,” was deeply wounded at age five by the loss of his much loved, sickly father. Child psychologists say that the most devastating impact from a father’s death occurs when the child is between three and five years old. When a father dies or is suddenly torn from a child’s life during this time, the child isn’t able to understand the father’s sudden absence or replace him with other relationships.

When Pastor Karl Ludwig Nietzsche died, his young son was emotionally lost. For the rest of his life, Nietzsche went in search of a father. Throughout his years as an ardent atheist, Nietzsche seemed to equate his father’s physical weakness with his Christianity. He mistakenly thought his dad was feeble because his dad’s religion was feeble.

Ironically, Nietzsche was himself often sickly and bedridden. For many years he was so ill his sister had to take care of him. But he never made the connection that the weakness of a person’s physical condition was not a reflection of his or her spiritual strength. Maybe his hurt went so deep that he just couldn’t see that truth.

As a young child Nietzsche had faith in God, but as he got older it faded until, as a troubled adult, he completely lost his faith. An abandoned child had once again been wounded by the loss of a father.

It seems that parental abandonment wounds can sow seeds of hopelessness, anger, bitterness, and self-hatred deep into the hearts and minds of famous men and women—and even in you and me.

Dying For a Hug

There's a story told about a young sailor who called his parents after his release from military service. He asked them if he could bring a friend home with him. The son confided, "Mom, my friend was pretty badly wounded in battle. He has only one leg, one arm, and one eye."

After a long pause the mother reluctantly said, "Of course, son, he can stay with us a little while." But her voice carried the message that they didn't want to be burdened very long with such a severely physically challenged person.

Two days later they got the news that their son had jumped to his death from a hotel window. When his body arrived home for burial it had only one leg, one arm, and one eye. His mother was heartbroken. For the rest of her life, she often cried, "Why didn't I speak more carefully, more lovingly? If I could only take back those selfish words, 'He can stay with us a little while.' But it's too late now!"

Having been emotionally abandoned and rejected by his parents, a wounded son felt there was nothing left to live for.

That sailor wasn't alone in feeling hopeless. Since 1937, more than 1,300 people have jumped from the Golden Gate Bridge. Only 16 out of over 1,300 have survived.

One survivor, John Kevin Hines, was 19 years old when he jumped. As Hines leapt, he wanted to scream, but because of the force of the descent, he couldn't. He later said that the moment he jumped he knew he had made a mistake. Deep down, he really didn't want to die.

After his horrific and excruciatingly painful 220-foot crash into a wall of icy water, John was fished out by a nearby boat and rushed to the hospital. He spent a month there recovering from a broken ankle and two shattered vertebrae. He found out the hard way that hitting the water at that speed would be a gruesome way to die.

Earlier that day, Hines sat on the bus, crying on his way to the bridge. He decided that if anyone asked him what was wrong, he wouldn't jump. But no one did. One woman approached him, but all she wanted was for him to take her picture. He did, but she never asked why he looked so sad. Minutes later he jumped.

It's been said that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. When you're hurting, it sometimes doesn't seem like it could be only temporary—but I know from personal experience that it is.

My most desperate moments changed my life.

My hurt is now able to help other people. My past suicidal depression fuels me with a passion to reach out to others trapped in the same prison. I have only become the person I am today because of the victories gained after devastating defeats. Remove my struggles and you remove the most significant dimensions of who I have become.

Are you constantly living as a victim of your past? Or have you allowed your personal abandonment to run its full course—to make you the person you're meant to be? Have you opened your heart to the God who desperately wants to heal you and transform you to fulfill your destiny?

Jesus came to heal your abandoned heart. He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, for He has appointed Me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."²²

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Wounds of Abandonment

Abandonment is the ransacking of the soul. It invades the most protected parts of our heart and leaves them in tatters. Lack of emotional nurturing by a father or mother leaves a gaping hole in a child's heart. A parent's failing to provide for a child's emotional needs creates gnawing questions: "If my father doesn't care about me, am I really worth anything?" "If my mother doesn't want to be with me, why would anyone else?"

Abandoned sons and daughters feel discarded by the one(s) they had hoped would love them the most. Instead of having the security and stability God intended in a healthy parent-child relationship, the abandoned are left devalued, questioning their own worth and significance. The abandoned child will always attempt to fill this void, usually with emotional sedatives: cutting, drugs, alcohol, sexual/relational dysfunctions, and tragically, even suicide.

The abandoned person mistakenly thinks, "Anything crammed into my broken heart is better than nothing." But forcing something to fit where it was never intended only makes the hole bigger and even harder to fill. It bruises the soul around the edges, making a future "perfect fit" much more difficult.

Our hearts were designed to be filled with the safety and security of loving parents. When that happens, the deepest inner longing of a child is met.

Because my wife, Suzie, had a wonderful relationship with her parents, she has never questioned God's love for her. She is so stable in her emotional foundation that sometimes it's difficult for her to understand those who aren't. Suzie thinks, "Of course God likes me!" Why does she think that? I believe it's because she never questioned whether her dad or mom liked her. For her, it's an emotional "no-brainer."

I, on the other hand, have had significant difficulty believing God actually likes me. For me, it was the defining question of my life. As long as it was left unsolved, I was tormented. But once this piece of my identity puzzle was in place, I was finally able to be at peace with who I am.

Abandoned Heroes

Moses was an abandoned child. The Egyptian pharaoh at the time of his birth issued a command to drown all male children born to Hebrew slaves in the Nile River. Desperate to protect her baby, Moses' mother sent him floating down the Nile in a basket, believing God would somehow intervene.

God did.

As Moses' sister watched, the pharaoh's daughter, who happened to be at the river that day, found the baby. She took him from the river and eventually adopted him. Moses grew up and was educated in the pharaoh's courts. But he knew he wasn't really one of them. One day Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Moses stepped in to save the Hebrew and killed the Egyptian, hiding his body in the sand.²³

But sin can't stay hidden for long.

The pharaoh found out about the murder, and Moses was forced to escape to the Sinai Peninsula. He stayed there as a reclusive shepherd, alone and unknown for 40 years. But it was in that hidden, lonely time that God prepared him to lead a nation. Once Moses was ready, God brought him back to rescue His people. The man who couldn't even rescue himself became a rescuer.

God works best when we are fully stripped of all self-confidence. Only His will leads to blessings—He alone knows the infinite ramifications of every decision we make. Through God, an abandoned son took a nation who thought God had abandoned them and led them out of slavery. Moses' abandonment didn't just shape his life—it helped make him the man God destined him to be. Everything that happens to us,

good or bad, will have positive consequences that stretch throughout eternity once we turn it all over to God to work with.

God chose the abandoned Moses to build Him a tabernacle in the wilderness.²⁴ God used the abandoned Moses to lead His people for 40 years across a wilderness. Moses' own 40 years in the wild was the perfect preparation for the next 40. An abandoned son reclaimed his childhood and became a father to the fatherless.

For Moses, abandonment initially lured him into a greater dependence on himself. We usually think of self-reliance as a good thing, but when we depend too much on ourselves, we end up leaving God and other people out of the picture. And that's never a good thing.

For every abandoned person, trust becomes the major life issue. It would take 40 years in the desert, a burning bush, and multiple miracles for Moses to completely trust God. Even then, at the end of his life, the abandonment issue of trust seemed to resurface when Moses did things his own way, disobeying God.

Here's the scene: God tells Moses, "You and Aaron must take the staff and assemble the entire community. As the people watch, command the rock over there to pour out its water. You will get enough water from the rock to satisfy all the people and their livestock." So Moses did as he was told. He took the staff from the place where it was kept before the LORD. Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with the staff, and water gushed out. So all the people and their livestock drank their fill. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust Me enough to demonstrate My holiness to the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land I am giving them!"²⁵ Moses didn't trust God enough to do it the way He said to, and he suffered the consequences.

Unresolved abandonment will cost us as well. But once our abandoned hearts are healed, we'll have the amazing opportunity to rescue other people. Jesus guarantees we will be happier giving than receiving.²⁶ I have spent many years now seeing this truth firsthand.

There is no way to overestimate the happiness of a healed heart.

Joseph, in the book of Genesis, was also abandoned. He was a favorite son who was sold into slavery by jealous brothers, and he was separated from his father for 20 years. But as a result, Joseph also learned to depend on God and not on other people. This led him down a path where he would eventually save his entire country from starvation.

Abandonment was once again the perfect preparation to lead a nation.

Even Paul, the mighty apostle, was abandoned by his fellow teachers of Hebrew law called Pharisees. This future New Testament author went alone into Arabia to meet with God.²⁷ A mighty epiphany occurred in his heart, and trust was reestablished with God. If we will reach out to Him, God knows how to meet us at our lowest moments. The byproduct of Paul's abandonment produced qualities of individuality, leadership and perseverance in him that could not have been refined without his soul being forced to either meet God or die.

We can't stop our fathers from abandoning us, either willingly or otherwise, but we can choose what we do about it. We can allow God to take our pain and make it into something amazing. The Bible says, "let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."²⁸

We can't relive our childhoods, but we can let God help us not be bitter about it.²⁹

We need to be far more committed to our healing than to our pain.

All pain is temporary, but healing can last forever.

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Father Legacies

In the previous chapter, we saw how King Hezekiah's self-absorption played a significant role in driving his son Manasseh into worshipping false gods and living in total depravity. Hezekiah went from being impressed with God to being impressed with himself, which cost him, his children and his nation a terrible price.

I believe Manasseh hated his father and everything he stood for. Manasseh was so wounded from being emotionally abandoned that he tried to tear down everything Hezekiah had built. He spent decades turned away from God and everything good—he even sacrificed his own sons to false gods that were actually demons. Completely depraved, Manasseh was castrated and taken away like a caged animal, with a ring through his nose and chains on his feet.

It was there, in a Babylonian prison, Manasseh finally came to his senses and cried out to God. Mercifully, God heard him and restored him as king over Israel. Because his heart was turned back to God, Manasseh tore down all of the altars he had built to false gods and lived the rest of his life healed and whole. But the damage to his son Amon had already been done. When Manasseh died after being king for 55 years, his 22-year-old son, Amon, became king.

The Bible tells us, “Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem two years. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, just as his father Manasseh had done. He worshiped and sacrificed to all the idols his father had made.”³⁰

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Clearly, Amon had been deeply wounded by his father's depravity. He had experienced the horror of knowing his father sacrificed his brothers to idols and demons. Now Amon passed on the curse and did the same thing.

Unless their hearts are healed and their spirits are rescued, abandoned children often become absentee parents. Manasseh got that healing, but Amon didn't. Look at the tragic difference it made: "But unlike his father, he [Amon] did not humble himself before the Lord. Instead, Amon sinned even more. At last Amon's own officials plotted against him and assassinated him in his palace."³¹ He was only 24.

But all hope was not lost.

Amon had an eight year-old son named Josiah, who remembered his godly grandfather, Manasseh. Fortunately, Josiah wasn't there to see Manasseh's decades of depravity. All Josiah knew was the transformed Manasseh. Josiah obviously liked his godly grandpa more than his own dad. How do we know that? Because he chose to follow his grandpa instead of his own dad by living a godly life.

This is a comeback story about a boy who had one of the worst fathers of all time. But the boy also had a courageous grandpa who turned away from his sinful life and back to God. It's about a grandpa who messed up—hugely—but finally came to his senses.

My hope is that we will all be able to see through every deception in our lives—all the things that blind us from the truth of who we're meant to be. And then, on the other side of our humility, future generations will receive the benefit of our healing.

Curses Are Meant To Be Broken

The Bible says that "Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight and followed the example of his ancestor David. He did not turn aside from doing what was right. During the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, Josiah began to seek the God of his ancestor David. Then in the twelfth year, he began to purify

Judah and Jerusalem, destroying all the pagan shrines, the Asherah poles, and the carved idols and cast images.”³²

When Josiah was 16-years old he began to seek God. He broke the curse! By the time he was 20 he was leading his nation to destroy everything evil. To put this in perspective, that would be like a teenager becoming President of the United States and then helping put an end to violence in America. We are never too young to seek God. We are never too young to lead others. We are never too young to allow God to transform our lives.

The Bible says, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”³³

When Josiah was 26 years old, he began to repair the temple of the Lord. It would take Josiah 18 years to clean up his dad’s mess. But in the end, Josiah managed to restore what earlier kings of Judah had allowed to fall into ruin.

In the middle of restoring the temple, Josiah found the Book of the Law of the Lord as it had been given to Moses. It had been lost for years. “When the king [Josiah] heard what was written in the law, he tore his clothes in despair.”³⁴

Josiah felt horrible because he realized he and his nation had not been doing what God’s law said they should do. But again God was merciful and sent a prophet to Josiah who said, “You were sorry and humbled yourself before God. You humbled yourself and tore your clothing in despair and wept before me in repentance. So I have indeed heard you, says the Lord.”³⁵

Then King Josiah called all of the people to the temple, from the lowest class to the highest. “There the king read to them the entire book of the covenant that had been found in the Lord’s temple.”³⁶

A fatherless son began to father a nation.

Grandpa Manasseh was not too late for his grandson. Your fatherlessness doesn’t have to negatively shape your destiny, either. Suzie and I are both first generation Christians. We broke the curse of unbelief. Now our lives are a blessing to our future generations.

Whatever your parents' reputation was, it doesn't have to be yours. Whatever your parents' sin was, it doesn't have to be yours.

Curses are meant to be broken.

Blessings are meant to be passed on.

When the Parentless Become Parents

After getting involved with drugs in college, I did everything I could to undermine authority because of my hatred for my father. I led anti-war protests, indulged in "free love," and watched my college graduation from a hillside while smoking weed with one of my professors.

One consequence of my hedonistic lifestyle was that I got two girls pregnant. I refused one baby was mine and walked away. I demanded the other be aborted.

Little did I know, the cycle of abandonment had been passed down from my father to me.

He didn't consider me a person.

He couldn't be bothered by my life.

He rejected me.

I had done the same to my unborn children.

Today I wear a wristband everyday that says LIFE to remember my unborn sons. I don't wear it out of shame, but because I finally have the understanding and courage to acknowledge that they didn't just exist, they were my flesh and blood. For the rest of my life, I'll look forward to seeing them in heaven because I know God is gracious and can make things right.

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Recently, a friend who had suffered many father wounds told me with infectious enthusiasm, “After a while, I stopped looking for a father and decided to be one.” That is exactly what Josiah did: “So Josiah removed all detestable idols from the entire land of Israel and required everyone to worship the Lord their God. And throughout the rest of his lifetime, they did not turn away from the Lord, the God of their ancestors.”³⁷

We were created to follow God all of the days of our lives and enjoy all the blessings that come as a result. If we choose to believe, we will see our children and grandchildren follow God, too. Josiah broke off the curse of his father. He began to follow the Word of God, and he led his nation back from the brink of destruction.

Josiah even restored the sacred ceremony called Passover, a time to remember how God had saved the children of Israel from centuries of slavery under the Egyptians. Because of Josiah’s obedience to God’s Word, the nation of Judah had a greater Passover than they did under any of the kings before him. He was healed from his father wounds so fully that he was able to lead a whole nation into loving God and turning around their lives. Like Josiah, we can be healed to the point that our hearts and lives are full of God’s goodness, even if the generations before us missed out.

You can look into someone’s eyes and see fatherlessness. There were many times in my life when you could have looked into my eyes and you would have clearly seen it.

Maybe sometimes you still can.

I will always wish I had had my dad’s approval. No amount of healing in my life will change the fact that he withheld it from me. All of the major challenges I’ve ever faced have been rooted in abandonment and rejection. But I refuse to pass on this curse to my children or grandchildren. So every day, I have to continue to learn how to listen, ask questions, and love as a father.

How I model or don't model being a father will affect many lives. The Bible says, "The glory of children is their father."³⁸ This word, "glory," in the original Hebrew language, means "an ornament we display." Whether we like it or not, we reflect our fathers, both earthly and heavenly.

Reflect the loving heart of your Heavenly Father. Let others see how God can fill any void, heal any pain, and restore what enemies have stolen from our hearts. It is not just a possibility—it's God's destiny for your life.

Questions for Discussion

1. Did you experience rejection or abandonment by one or both of your parents during childhood? If so, how have these experiences impacted your life?
2. Do you think these experiences affect the way you think and relate to your Heavenly Father? Describe ways this affects your relationship with Him.
3. Do you think your mother or father, or both, experienced abandonment or rejection during their life? If so, how do you think that affected their life and their parenting?
4. Forgiveness is critical to becoming whole because unforgiveness keeps you “stuck” in the pain of the past. Are you willing to begin to forgive your father/mother for childhood wounding? If so, how do you think this decision will affect your healing from abandonment and rejection?
5. Do you have a willingness to ask God for a breakthrough in your areas of rejection and abandonment and begin to better reflect the loving heart of your Heavenly Father to others? If you are willing, how do you think this decision will affect your life and the lives around you?