

Life Beyond Your Parents' Mistakes

The Transforming Power
of God's Love

David Powlison



www.newgrowthpress.com

Sally grew up in a dangerous household. During her teen years, her father sexually molested her, putting a bitter icing on their miserable relationship. Though she became a Christian in high school, Sally felt that she could never know God as her Father. Her relationship with her earthly father was just too damaging. Now twenty-eight years old, she still tends to see God as untrustworthy, demanding, merciless, and unpredictable.

Keasha's mom was verbally abusive. She constantly criticized Keasha, nitpicking the smallest flaws. Anger and avoidance were the family's "standard operating procedure." Keasha has her own family now, but she still struggles to understand God's love for her. "How can I?" she said to me, "My mom made me feel worthless and unlovable. God's love can seem like just words to me."

Bill's father abandoned the family when Bill was three. Bill's mother worked two jobs to keep her family going. Bill never saw his dad again, and his mom was often preoccupied with the stress of being the sole caregiver for her family. Now thirty-six, Bill recently sought

counseling because of his long-standing sense that “God is remote, like my parents were.”*

Can You Know God's Love Even Though Your Own Parents Failed?

What about you? Perhaps you too feel like your parents' failures have kept you from knowing God's love and learning to love others. It is a common problem. And it does not have a snap-your-fingers solution. But it does have a true solution that patiently works in you. Take heart: God wants you to know and experience his love for you. He takes the time to make it more than mere words. His Word is full of reminders that he personally and powerfully loves his children:

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us

all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31–32)

God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Romans 5:5)

You received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba! Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. (Romans 8:15–16)

These aren’t just words. God does what he says. They aren’t just good intentions. He initiates a living relationship. These passages speak of two central ways that God shows his love to us. First, the historical fact: Jesus Christ went to an agonizing death out of love for his children. Second, the powerful dynamic within our hearts: the Holy Spirit pours out God’s love in us to create the child’s trusting response. *Did* God act in love in history? *Does* God act now in love within our hearts? Yes! God’s love is effective, both then and now.

But what about when we feel disconnected from the historical fact of Christ’s death for us and from the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit? What about Sally,

Keasha, and Bill? What about you? What do you do when you don't understand God's love for you? When the cross of Christ leaves you cold? When the Holy Spirit seems to be only a theory—not a daily help in times of trouble? What do you do when there is little or no “Abba, Father” in your heart?

People who struggle with understanding God's love for them often hear two thoughts from Christian counselors and others trying to help them.

- *Statement #1* is “You can't really appreciate God as Father if you had a poor relationship with your human parents.”
- *Statement #2* is about counseling methods and often follows the first statement. It says, “If you have had parent problems in your personal history, you now need some sort of re-parenting or corrective emotional experience. You need the love of a parent substitute, therapist, mentor, or support group before you can experience God as a loving Father.”