

Father's Day has always held special meaning for me. I was born on Father's Day. At the time of my birth my dad had moved away to Ohio to start a new job. My mom had been advised by her doctor not to travel, so she and my four siblings Sandy, Bruce, Debby and Brian remained in North Carolina, near most of my dad's family.



The day I was born, Dad's sister, Aunt Bea, called my dad to let him know he had a new baby girl. But I was born with low birth weight, jaundice, lung trouble and I needed several blood transfusions. The doctor was afraid I wouldn't make it.

That was the beginning of a special bond between me, my dad and our heavenly Father. Dad told me later that he had prayed so hard that day, and how much he wanted to see his new little girl. He dedicated my life to God if he would just let me live. Dad told me I was the best Father's Day gift he ever received.

Growing up, all of us kids had nicknames. Sandy was Skumpy, Bruce was Rufus, Debby was Pumpkin and Brian was Mr. Magoo—not because he had vision problems, but because he always seemed to be in trouble or getting into some crazy situation!

My nickname was "Lollipop." As a little girl, I loved to hop in my dad's lap and listen to his

stories or hear him sing. We didn't have the proverbial "two nickels to rub together," but our family was rich in love. In so many ways, my mom and dad showed us how deeply they loved us.

When I was about two years old, we moved from North Carolina to my mom's hometown in North Dakota, near my Grandma Olga (Dee

rather than preaching at me about a bunch of rules I wasn't quite living up to.

Grandma Dee Dee loved to listen to religious radio programs back in the early 60s, and she introduced my dad to a radio program that eventually changed all our lives.

The radio preacher taught that Christians needed to observe a strict seventh-day Sabbath, and

The Best Father's Day Gift

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Dee). Grandma Dee Dee was a very sweet Christian lady. She attended the Baptist church in town, but she believed every church helped the town and she donated to all of them. Her example has been an inspiration to our family and others over many years.

In many ways, Grandma Dee Dee was my hero, someone who showed me what it means to show unconditional love. She showed Jesus' love in action,

to follow the old covenant dietary (kosher) rules—and my dad totally bought in.

At the time, my parents owned a hotel and café in town. Because of his newfound beliefs, my dad suddenly stopped serving pork and shrimp, he took out all the cigarette machines, and he even closed the café on Saturdays—the busiest day of the week!

People around town began to think my dad was crazy. Finally, my dad sold the hotel and café,



packed up Mom and us four younger kids, and moved us over 1,000 miles away to a small town in Texas where we had no friends, no relatives and Dad had no job or prospects for work. All so my parents could enroll us kids in a private school founded by that radio preacher, because Dad believed it was “God’s school.”

When Rules and Laws Overshadow Love

I always admired my dad for his zeal to do what he believed God wanted him to do. Dad would demonstrate his faith and love for

God by the way he lived. But sometimes it seemed to me that Dad cared about being right with God and keeping the letter of the law more than he cared about showing mercy and affection to our family—especially to us kids.

As a teenager, there were times when I thought my dad was unfair and out of touch. He was basically clueless about what life was like for his teen-aged daughter. I knew he loved me, but Dad became increasingly distant and strict in my teen years. Instead of calling me “Lollipop,” I was more often “young lady.”

Now that I’ve raised teenagers of my own, I understand his intentions a little better, and I realize everyone has had similar experiences to a degree. But I distinctly remember one time when I had been away for three weeks at a summer camp in Minnesota. I was so excited to see my dad again. All I wanted to do was give him a big hug. But all Dad seemed to notice was the pink nail polish I was wearing. He grabbed my hand as I tried to hug him and snarled, “Take that off right away, young lady!”

Where was my hug? Where was my “Welcome home, “Lollipop”? It seemed laws and rules were getting in the way of our loving relationship.

After high school, I moved away from home to attend college. At the end of my junior year of college I married my husband, Juan—two years later our son Tim was born.

When you have kids of your own, you begin to appreciate the sacrifices your own parents made for you. As little Timmy grew, and a few years later our daughter Tawny was born, I wished I had gotten to know my own dad better. I desperately wished I could get back to that special, intimate relationship of “Daddy” and “Lollipop.”

Unfortunately, that was just about the time Dad began to exhibit the early stages of Alzheimer’s disease. I felt so cheated. I was finally at the point in my life when I wanted to spend time with my dad and I deeply wanted to get to know him better. I actually *wanted* to hear his old stories again, and I wanted him to tell my kids those same stories. But it was too late.

At first Dad was just confused, forgetting what he was talking about or even who he was





talking to. I soon realized I'd never get a chance to have a real conversation with him again. My mom took care of Dad for as long as she was physically able, but eventually Dad had to go into a nursing home.

The last time I saw my dad alive was in the summer of 1995. Our whole family got together at the nursing home for my parent's 50th wedding anniversary. By then Dad was in a wheelchair and barely able to utter even a few words. I remember watching him stare intently at the birds in the cafeteria atrium and whistle old familiar tunes. But the dad I remembered and loved so much was basically already gone.

The Incredible Love of My Heavenly Father

Dad died three years later, in December, 1998. This year marks the 19th Father's Day I've spent without him. When my dad passed away, I began seeking a deeper relationship with my heavenly Father. I realized that I knew a lot about God, a lot about facts of the Bible, but I didn't

know God as a real person. Like Jesus' "Abba," I wanted to know God as my loving Daddy.

Rules, regulations and rituals had gotten in the way of my relationship with my heavenly Father, as they had with my earthly Dad. In the last few years, I've been learning what Jesus "came to show us the Father" means. So many of us have been raised with the idea that God is like the bad cop and Jesus is like the good cop.

We think God the Father is sitting on his judge's bench with a giant gavel in hand, ready to sentence us to a terrible punishment if we don't live up to his perfect, holy standards.

And then we think of Jesus as God the Son—the kind, merciful, loving healer who came to take our place and suffer the punishment we deserved and should have received. What's up with that?

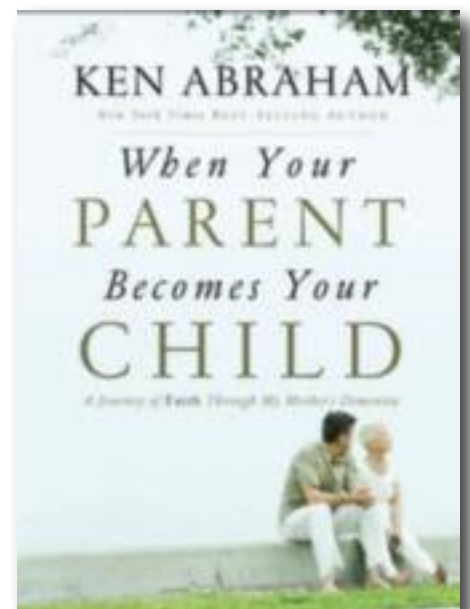
Scripture actually shows us that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one—One in nature, one in essence—and One in love!

Book Review, Ken Abraham, *When Your Parent Becomes Your Child: A Journey of Faith Through My Mother's Dementia* (Thomas Nelson, 2012).

New York Times best-selling author, Ken Abraham's book, *When Your Parent Becomes Your Child*, is a heartfelt personal diary of Ken's "journey of faith through [his] mother's dementia." Using a blend of facts and humor, Abraham journals his experience of dealing with his mother, Minnie—from the first apparent signs of her dementia to her departure from this life. He details the challenges of learning to recognize and understand Minnie's new quirks and behaviors—as well as the gradual toll dementia took on Minnie's aging body.

Ken often flashes back, sharing a vivid picture of who Minnie was and how the disease gradually changed her. Throughout the book, Abraham shares valuable medical research and facts on dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

For more information about the early warning signs of dementia, coping strategies, and finding a local support group, visit the Alzheimer's Association website (www.alz.org). □





That is the one true nature of *Elohim* ... the triune Lord: AGAPE—deep, profound love.

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God IS love” (1 John 4:7-8, my emphasis).

Last April, our first granddaughter Heather was born. But even before I saw the first ultrasound image of her, I knew I loved her beyond measure. Before I even knew she was a girl or if she would make it to full term, I knew that I loved our “little peanut” with all my heart.

In the same way, God has loved each of us from the very beginning.

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:13-16).

Our Heavenly Father is the same “Abba” or “Daddy” to whom Jesus prayed. He is kind, loving and merciful beyond anything our human hearts can fathom or measure:

“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:16-29).

If we come to truly realize and internalize how deeply we are loved by the Father, it will change the way we feel about ourselves and consequently how we feel about others. It will impact how we treat them. Actions truly speak louder than words, and how we treat others speaks volumes about the love of God that flows through us.

It means the world to me that my “Daddy” considered me his best Father’s Day gift ever. And I know without a doubt, thanks to the immeasurable love of our heavenly Father, I will see my “Daddy” again one day. And when I see him, he’ll embrace me in a big hug and say “Welcome home, Lollipop.” □

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