

The Father's Heart in a Wounded Generation



Gary Wilkerson July 16, 2018

Claiming Your Valued Inheritance

Right now, a generation is entering adulthood—and they're desperately wounded. These are young men and women who've grown up with what I call orphan hearts. They feel they have no direction in life. They don't sense the caring oversight that comes from a loving heavenly Father. And they're turning away from the Christian message completely.

This may be because they grew up fatherless or motherless. Maybe a parent physically abandoned them. Or maybe a parent was emotionally detached. Many in this wounded generation still look for hope in Jesus. But they look around their church and wonder, "Everyone here must feel so loved. They raise their hands freely in worship. Why don't I feel the same way?"

Their wounds are deep—and they usually react to these wounds in one of two ways.

The effects of abuse or neglect are tragic. And the deep human reaction to these things is universal. People may cower and withdraw, blaming themselves for what they experienced, or they may lash out in anger, unable to trust anyone.

You've probably known Christians who relate in these ways. When I meet them, I don't see cowardly people or angry, rebellious people. I see people who've been wounded to the point of weakness. They're compensating for what's never been sown into them. Even those who tend to rage act out of a sense of emptiness—an inner conviction that tells them, "Don't let them see the real you, because you're not worthy. You're bad, terrible, not good enough." It only perpetuates the orphan spirit inside them.

Jesus addresses this directly in his Sermon on the Mount. He speaks to an anxious, wounded generation when he says, "Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them.

And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are?... Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you" (Matthew 6:26, 28-30, NLT, my emphasis).

What incredible news for any generation—but especially for a wounded one. The heart of the passage is Jesus' question: "Aren't you far more valuable to him?" It's actually a statement—and it cuts straight through all anger, stress, anxiety, frustration, and deep sense of failure.

That last trait—a sense of failure—is a stronghold in multitudes of Christians.

We all fail, and we'll continue to fail. But many in Christ's body think of themselves as total failures in everything.

They feel they can't do or say anything right, and they spend sleepless nights condemning themselves. When they get up the next day, they determine to try harder—but that only makes things worse, because they'll never arrive at the place of perfection they've imagined.

After a while, they get worn down in their walk with Jesus. They think something is permanently wrong with them. And they end up gravitating toward harsh messages by harsh preachers who tell them what they already think of themselves: "You're no good, and God has to change you."

I feel so badly for these burdened-down believers. As their pastor, I saw them come into church each week hoping God would give them some kind of permanent fix. Looking out from the pulpit, I saw the desperation in their eyes. They hoped I would preach something they could latch onto that might heal them of ongoing failure.

But I preached to them as I've preached to everyone over the decades: God isn't a mechanic. He isn't in the business of fixing us. And we don't have to "get fixed" to earn his blessing. He has already blessed us. I've lost track of the number of people I've counseled, "As a Christian, you operate from a place of grace. You don't work to *get* grace."

That's the thrust of Jesus' words in this passage. He tells us, "You toil and spin in a way that flowers never have to—yet God graces even plants with beauty and life. Don't you know you're infinitely more valuable in your Father's eyes? You don't have to worry and strive to please him. He enables you to be exactly who he wants you to be—because he loves you."

When Jesus went to the Cross, it was a demonstration of this great love for us. He stood in our place despite our many imperfections and failures—all because we're so valuable to him.

I can relate to the wounded generation.

Through my early decades, I was gripped by an orphan spirit. If you accidentally stepped on my foot, I would apologize for having my foot under yours.

It's not that I questioned my value in God's eyes. My parents always spoke into me a sense of destiny. "You're going to make an impact on the world," they said. "God's going to use you to touch lives." They were wonderful that way.

Yet I also inherited from them something that contributed to my orphan spirit. I always got the sense I could be doing more than I was doing. My father was part of a generation that felt there was always one more sermon to preach, one more article to write, one more person to lead to Jesus, one more married couple to counsel. Their thinking was, "I'm not enough until I do enough."

That filtered down to me—and it created anxiety in me. It took me years to learn there's a huge difference between being driven by God and being led by God.

Paul saw the Galatian Christians laboring under this kind of burden. He wrote to show them how different God's way is with his children: "God sent his Son...to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, 'Abba, Father.' Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir" (*Galatians 4:4-7*).

What a beautiful contrast. We're not slaves to any system of performance. Instead, Paul says, God has drawn us to himself tenderly, as his "own child." Plus, Paul uses a word for "adopt" here that has two meanings. One meaning is strictly legal. But the other means "to put into place, to cause to belong." Our heavenly Father doesn't just legally adopt us, showing acceptance and approval. He gives us his attention, his affection, even his authority. And he blesses us with his own nature: "You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God" (*1 Peter 1:23, ESV*).

I once had an experience that drove all of this home to me, changing how I viewed Jesus—and myself.

This experience transformed my life, my relationships, and how I approached ministry. I don't trust so-called spiritual experiences that aren't grounded in God's Word. But this one was.

Several years ago, I had what I would call a "waking dream." The only way I can describe it is to say it was like seeing a dream unfold before me without being asleep.

In the dream, I was standing in the balcony of a gorgeous lodge made of magnificent timbers. The towering windows were made of beautiful stained glass, and inside, near the ceiling, lights sparkled with a natural glow. I thought to myself, "I'm not in the throne room of grace, but I know this is a heavenly place."

Below me on the spacious wooden floor was a joyous gathering of people enjoying a grand, lavish feast.

Beyond the long banquet table was an amazing string band playing glorious music. The people bobbed their heads and kept turning their attention in a single direction. Finally, I was able to see what captured their gaze. It was Jesus—and he was dancing.

His movements were amazing—powerful yet graceful, the way I imagine King David dancing before the Lord. His arms were outstretched, and the movements he made emitted power, beauty, and authority. It was awe-inspiring.

Yet as I watched all this, a terrible feeling rose up in me. I thought, "I'm all alone in this place. I don't fit in. Why can't I take part in this?" Feeling sullen, I trudged down the stairs. Then I felt someone take my hand. It was Christ—and he lifted me up and set my feet on top of his, the way a father would take his little child. He began to dance again, and suddenly I became part of the amazing movements he did. I was at the very center of his joy—and it was thrilling.

I marveled at what was happening, the sheer beauty and joy of it. Then Jesus looked at me and said smiling, "Gary, this isn't about you. It's about me."

With that, everything changed. "Wow," I realized. "I see my whole life is about you, Jesus. It's not about my problems. It's a dance—and it's about you. This great feast is about you. This song is about you. I get it now. Everything I've ever looked for is wrapped up in you."

In that instant, my whole entire focus was transformed. My esteem, my value, my sense of worth were no longer things I wanted to pursue. I'd found them in Christ. And I realized, "I fit in! I can dance! I can eat and drink and enter fully into this, because he holds me within him."

As the song ended, Jesus motioned for me to follow him to two huge wooden doors. He opened them up to a valley scene dotted with villages. "You can't just stay here and dance," Christ told me. "You have to go and tell them about my love. Tell them about my dance. Tell them what awaits them. Don't worry, I'll be with you everywhere you go."

And he was present with me. As I headed for the villages, I felt his arms around my shoulders, as if he were still holding me in the dance. I thought, "This doesn't feel like work; this is a gift. The burden I feel for these villages doesn't weigh me down; I feel light, because Jesus carries the burden. I can go wherever he leads me, and do whatever he calls me to do, because he's with me."

It was only a dream—but since that time I've never felt unvalued in my walk with the Lord.

I risk sharing this experience with you because I know there are a lot of Christians like me. The orphan spirit is prevalent today throughout a wounded generation. It afflicts some of the most earnest, devoted Christians. But God has made a different way for his children. He wants to show you how valuable you are to him, how powerfully you belong in his family. He has made you an heir not to an earthly burden, but to a great heavenly inheritance. Claim your inheritance today, and join Jesus in a great dance of life. You are his valuable treasure!

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