

**THE DAD WE
NEVER KNEW
WE HAD**



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Dedication

For my dad,

who taught me what a real relationship with a father should be.

I never would have found the Father in heaven
if I hadn't first been loved by a great one on earth.

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Prologue: The Dad We Never Knew We Had

Forget everything you think you know.

Forget the stained-glass windows, the echoing halls, and the figure on a distant throne. Forget the list of rules you were told you had to follow to be good enough. Forget the fear that you could mess up so badly that He would turn His back on you.

Let's talk about Dad.

Not a king who demands your allegiance, but the father who taught you how to ride a bike and ran alongside you, hands hovering, ready to catch you before you even knew you were falling.

Not a judge waiting to punish your mistakes, but the dad who saw the shattered lamp on the floor, looked at your terrified face, and pulled you into a hug first, whispering, "It's okay, we can fix it together."

We've spent our lives looking up at the sky for a God who is untouchable, when all along, our Father has been right here on the ground, kneeling at our level, trying to get our attention. He's the one who sits with you in the dark when you can't find the words. He's the one who delights in your laughter, who feels your heartbreak as if it were His own, and who would rather walk through fire than see you face it alone.

This isn't a book about religion. It's a re-introduction to the Dad you were always meant to have. The one who doesn't just love you, but actually likes you. The one who isn't waiting for you to be perfect; He's just waiting for you to come home.

Imagine a love so real, so present, you could build your life on it.

That's Him. Let's go meet Him.

Chapter 1: The Hallway

The hallway is long.

Marble floors so polished you can see the reflection of the high, arched windows. Portraits of ancient, stern-faced ancestors line the walls, their painted eyes following you. The air is cold, silent, heavy with the scent of old stone and beeswax. At the far end, two massive doors stand closed. You know who is behind them. The King.

Every step echoes. Your heart hammers against your ribs. You've been taught your whole life what this walk means. You straighten your collar, smooth your shirt. You rehearse the words you're supposed to say, the proper way to bow. Don't speak unless spoken to. Don't make a mistake. This is the most important moment of your life. An audience with the King.

You reach the doors. They are taller than you can comprehend, carved from a wood so dark it seems to drink the light. There are no handles. You're supposed to wait. A guard, silent as a statue, is meant to announce you. You stand there, hands trembling, feeling small and utterly out of place.

And then the doors are thrown open, crashing against the stone walls.

The light from inside is blindingly warm. The room isn't a throne room; it's filled with laughter, music, and the smell of a feast. And standing there in the center of it all is Him. He's not on a throne. He's not wearing a crown. He's just in a simple shirt, his face beaming.

He looks right at you, and a grin spreads across His face. He doesn't wait for you to bow. He starts walking toward you, shaking his head with a laugh that fills the entire room.

"You little shit," He says, His voice overflowing with more love than you've ever felt. "What took you so long?"

He pulls you into a hug that cracks your ribs and lifts you off the floor, the kind of hug that says I've been waiting forever for this. He sets you down, slaps you on the back, and looks you in the eye, all the royalty gone, replaced by a love so fierce it takes your breath away.

"Damn, I missed you, buddy."

He keeps His arm wrapped tight around your shoulders, refusing to let you go, and turns you both to face the party. For a moment, the music and laughter die down as everyone turns to look. You feel a hundred pairs of eyes on you, and the old fear from the hallway starts to creep back in. You feel exposed, unworthy of being the center of attention.

But then He pulls you in even closer, and His voice booms across the room, not with authority, but with a pride so thick it's tangible.

"Everyone!" He shouts, His voice cracking with joy. "Look who's finally home!"

He gives you a little shake. "This is my kid! The one I've been telling you about!"

He looks around the room, His eyes shining, making sure every single person sees you standing there next to Him. He's not just introducing you; He's showing you off.

"Look at them," He says, his voice softening but still carrying across the room. "I am so damn proud. They found their way back."

And in that moment, under the weight of His pride, every ounce of fear you ever had evaporates. You're not an intruder. You're not a disappointment. You are the guest of honor. You are the reason for the party. You are His, and He couldn't be happier to finally have you home.

Chapter 2: A Seat at the Table

The party is in full swing, but if you're like me, even in the warmth of the Father's hug, a cold question lingers: "...but what about Judgment Day?" We've been so conditioned to expect a trial that we can't fully relax at the party. We're waiting for the other shoe to drop.

I get it. I lived with that fear for years. But the Bible, when you look at it from a different angle, tells a story that is far more beautiful and powerful than the one we've been taught. It starts with our position.

Where are we, right now, in relation to the Father? The Apostle Paul gives us a stunning answer in his letter to the Ephesians. He says that God, in His great love, "raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6).

Read that again. It's not a future promise. It's a past-tense reality. From the Father's perspective, you are already seated in the heavens. And where are you seated? With Christ.

Jesus, our Brother, sits at the right hand of the Father, a unique position of supreme honor. He's the Son of God, the King of Kings. We are not His equal in divinity, but because we are His family—the Royal Family—He pulls up a seat for us right there beside Him. We're not in the hallway waiting for an audience. We're not in the back of the room hoping to be noticed. We are at the main table, next to our Brother, sharing in the family's honor.

So if that's our position now, what does that make "Judgment Day"?

This is where we have to look closely at what the Apostle Paul actually wrote. In his second letter to the church in Corinth, he says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). That phrase, "judgment seat," is what sounds so terrifying. But the original Greek word Paul chose to use here is Bema.

When Paul, a man fluent in Greek culture, used the word Bema, his audience would not have pictured a criminal court. They would have pictured the awards platform at the Olympic Games. The Bema was the raised stand where the umpire of the games sat, not to condemn the athletes, but to watch the race and then hand out the crowns and rewards to the victors.

The Bema is not a trial to decide your fate; it's an awards ceremony.

Paul goes on to explain what happens at this Bema review. In another letter, this time to the Corinthians, he says our lives are like a building, and the day will come when our work is tested by fire (1 Corinthians 3). He says some of us build with "gold, silver, costly stones"—things of eternal value, done out of love for the Father. Others build with "wood, hay, straw"—things done for our own ego, out of fear, or for temporary praise.

The fire comes to burn away the second category. It purifies. It removes all the junk, all the stuff that wasn't real, all the motives that weren't pure. But here is the most important part of the whole passage.

Paul says that if a person's work is burned up, "they will suffer loss but will themselves be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames."

Think about that. Even if your life was 99% hay and straw, the Father still drags you out of the fire. He saves you. The child is never, ever at risk. He just wants to get all the flammable junk off of you so you can enjoy the party.

So, what does that actually look like? It's not a cold, sterile courtroom. It's a banquet table. It's the homecoming party from Chapter 1 still in full swing. And it looks a lot like the Father standing up, glass in hand, to give a toast in your honor.

Imagine it. You're sitting there, the party swirling around you. The Father stands up. He picks up a spoon and taps it gently against His glass. Ting, ting, ting. The sound cuts through the joyful noise, and a warm, expectant silence falls over the room. He's still standing right beside you, His hand resting on your shoulder.

"I want to say something," He begins, His voice filling the space. He looks around at the crowd of faces, then His eyes land on you, and they stay there. "We're all here tonight because this one," He says, gesturing to you, "is finally home. And I couldn't be prouder."

A cheer goes up. Jesus, sitting next to you, puts an arm around your shoulder and gives you a squeeze.

"Now, I know this kid," the Father continues with a grin. "And the road here wasn't always pretty. I remember that time they were so angry, so lost, they stood in a field and screamed at the sky, blaming Me for everything. They let Me have it with both barrels." He pauses, a twinkle in His eye. "And I thought, 'Finally! They're being honest! Now we can talk!' That was a good day."

The crowd laughs, and you feel a knot you didn't even know you were carrying come undone.

"Oh, and the screw-ups!" He throws His head back and laughs. "There were some legendary ones. Remember that decision with the money? The one that cost them almost everything? From the outside, it looked like a disaster. But I saw them on their knees the next day, for the first time in years, admitting they couldn't do it on their own. That failure was the best thing that ever happened to them. It brought them back to Me. I was so proud in that moment."

He looks at you, and His expression softens. "But then there were the other moments. The ones nobody else saw."

"I saw you," He says, His voice dropping to a near-whisper, "give your last twenty dollars to that homeless guy, hoping no one was watching. I saw that. That was for Me."

"I saw you stay up all night with a friend who was falling apart, just listening, when you were exhausted yourself. I saw that. That was for Me."

“I saw you forgive the person who broke your heart, not because they deserved it, but because you knew it was what I would do. That was harder than moving a mountain for you. And you did it. I saw that. And my heart nearly burst.”

He raises His glass. The whole room follows.

“So, yeah,” the Father says, His voice thick with emotion. “They screwed up. They got lost. They were a piece of work. But they had a heart that was trying to beat like mine. And they are here. Home. So let’s raise a glass to my kid. Welcome to the party. It’s so damn good to have you back.”

Chapter 3: The Guy in the Passenger Seat

Let's be honest. For most of us, prayer feels like a chore we're failing at.

It's that nagging guilt at the end of the day when you realize you forgot to do it. It's the awkward silence when you finally kneel down and can't think of anything to say besides, "Um, hi." It's the feeling that you're just talking to the ceiling, sending messages into a cosmic void and hoping for a reply that rarely seems to come.

We treat prayer like a scheduled conference call with the CEO of the Universe. We have to get our agenda right, use the proper formal language, and hope we don't get sent to voicemail. We've turned the most intimate part of a relationship into a corporate formality, and then we wonder why it feels so empty.

But what if the whole model is wrong? What if prayer isn't a phone call you have to make?

What if Dad is just sitting in the passenger seat of your car?

Imagine it. You get in your truck to go to work. The engine turns over, the radio comes on. You glance over at the passenger seat, and He's there. Just sitting there, looking out the window, comfortable. He's not holding a clipboard. He's not waiting for a formal address. He's just along for the ride.

You pull out into traffic, and some idiot in a BMW cuts you off. The anger flashes through you, and you're about to lay on the horn and flip him the bird. You glance over, and Dad just raises an eyebrow with a little smirk that says, "Really?" And you take a breath. You don't say a word, but the conversation happened.

A song comes on the radio that reminds you of a tough time you went through. A wave of gratitude washes over you for being on the other side of it. You look over and see Him humming along, and you just nod. He nods back. He knows. Conversation.

You're driving to a meeting you're dreading. Your stomach is in knots. You're not even thinking, just worrying. You feel a hand on your shoulder, and you look over. He just gives you a reassuring squeeze. It's not a promise you'll get the deal, but it's a promise you're not walking into that room alone. Conversation.

This is prayer. It's the constant, running, sometimes wordless dialogue with the Person who is always with you. It's the shared glance, the silent understanding, the gut-level honesty. It's complaining to Him, laughing with Him, worrying with Him, and just being with Him.

Think about it: He already knows all your problems before you even say them. He knows your fears, your needs, your frustrations. But how often does He just get to hear you say, "Thank you"? Not for anything specific, maybe. Just... "Thank you for being here." "Thank you for that sunset." "Thank you for the ride."

Stop trying to call the King in the castle. Just turn and talk to the Dad in the passenger seat. He's been waiting for you to notice. He's been there the whole time.

Chapter 4: The Owner's Manual

There's a heavy book sitting on a shelf in most of our houses, collecting dust. The Bible. The Word of God. And for so many of us, it's a source of immense guilt.

We're told we should read it every day. But if you're like me, it's not that simple. I'm dyslexic, and I have ADHD on top of it. When I sit down and try to read, the words start swimming. My mind wanders in a million different directions. I'll read the same paragraph three times and have no idea what it said.

And let's be honest, some of it is written in a language that sounds like a Shakespearean play that got into a fight with a legal document. All the "thees" and "thous" and "wherefores." I'm just trying to figure out what Jesus said, not trying to solve a word puzzle from the 17th century. It's easy to feel lost before you even get to the good part.

For years, I thought this meant I was broken. I was failing at one of the most basic parts of being a believer.

But then I realized I was looking at it all wrong. We've been taught that the Bible is a rulebook we have to study, or an instruction manual we have to memorize. We've made it into homework. But that's not what it is.

It's a story. It's the greatest story ever told. It's our family history. And the goal isn't to just read the story; it's to understand it.

I can't just sit and read for hours, but I can see and I can hear. So, I found other ways. I started watching videos about it on YouTube. You know how it goes—you watch one video from a pastor or a historian explaining a passage, and suddenly the algorithm starts feeding you more. One video about the history of ancient Israel leads to another about the life of King David, which leads to a deep dive into the meaning of a parable. I was learning. I was connecting. The story was coming alive for me in a way it never could on a printed page.

This isn't an excuse not to engage with the Bible. It's an invitation to engage with it in the way your brain actually works.

The point isn't to just read the words in Revelation; it's to understand that you're holding the secret to the future. The point isn't to just read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; it's to pull the real-life stories from their pages and see our Brother, Jesus, walking on this earth. To feel what He felt—His frustration, His compassion, His exhaustion, His fierce love.

Don't let anyone make you feel guilty for how you connect with the story. Maybe you listen to an audio Bible on your commute. Maybe you watch animated videos that break down the history. Maybe you find a teacher who makes the context come alive.

Stop trying to force yourself to read the owner's manual. Instead, find a way to fall in love with the family story. Because when you understand the story, you start to understand your place in it. And that's when everything changes.

Chapter 5: My Religion is a Relationship

People ask me sometimes, “What’s your religion?” It’s a simple question, but my answer has gotten simpler over the years. I just say, “I’m a Christian.”

That usually leads to a follow-up: “Okay, but what kind? Catholic? Baptist? Methodist?”

I get it. We live in a world that loves labels. But I grew up Catholic, and if I’m being honest, my main takeaway was a pretty good leg workout. Stand up, sit down, kneel. Stand up, sit down, kneel. Ring the bells! Stand up, sit down, kneel again. Every Sunday felt like Groundhog Day—watching the same movie, saying the same words, going through the same motions, over and over.

Now, please hear my heart on this. This is just my opinion, my perspective from my own messy journey, and I might be wrong. I’m not here to put any specific church or denomination on blast. Millions of people find beautiful community, comfort, and a connection to the Father within those walls, and that is a wonderful thing.

But for me, all that repetition felt like I was just going through the motions. It felt like a system of rules, not the reality of a relationship. And if I’m being brutally honest, I’ve come to believe that religion, as a man-made system of rules and performance, is mostly bullshit.

That might sound shocking, but it’s not just my idea. The Apostle Paul, one of the most important leaders in the history of our faith, said the exact same thing. In his letter to the Philippians, he lists all his religious credentials—his perfect heritage, his flawless rule-following, his status as a top-tier Pharisee. Then he says that compared to the incredible value of actually knowing Jesus, all of that stuff was skubala.

That’s the original Greek word he used (Philippians 3:8). Most Bibles translate it politely as “garbage” or “rubbish.” But that’s not what it means. Skubala is a coarse, vulgar word. It means excrement. Dung. Shit.

Paul, a brilliant scholar, chose the most offensive word he could think of to describe his religious resume. He was screaming that all his perfect religious performance was a pile of shit compared to having a real, personal relationship with the Father through Jesus.

When I realized that, it set me free. It confirmed what I felt in my gut: God is not interested in our religious systems. He wants our hearts.

This is the balance I try to walk: I’m wary of man-made religion, but I am passionate about the Church.

And when I say "Church," I don't mean a building with a steeple. I mean what Jesus meant when He said, "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). The Church is the family. It’s you and your Dad talking over coffee in the morning. It’s a small group in a living room praying for each other.

But maybe the truest form of "Church" is when we stop gathering for ourselves and start being the Church for others.

I had a friend named Ed. He was a homeless man, and we just started talking one day. I didn't see a project; I saw a person. I asked him his story. Over the years, we became great friends. We'd talk about life, about God, about our struggles. That was church. It was seeing a human being the way the Father sees him.

My daughter, she didn't go to a church building either. She was only 25 when she died. But after she passed, so many people came to me and said they were struggling with addiction and that she had helped them. She had sat with them, listened to them, and loved them when they felt unlovable. Think about that. She was being the Church without ever stepping foot in one.

Maybe that's the real point. Maybe being the Church isn't about where you go on Sunday morning. Maybe it's about finding the "Eds" of the world who need a friend. Maybe it's about helping the people who are struggling, just like my daughter did. It's about carrying the Father's heart out of the living room and into a world that desperately needs it.

And this isn't just a nice thought. It's the final exam. Jesus himself said that on the last day, the only question that will matter is how we treated the "least of these"—the hungry, the stranger, the sick. He said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

When I befriended Ed, I was befriending Jesus. When my daughter sat with someone lost in addiction, she was sitting with Jesus. That's the real Church. That's the only religion that matters.

Chapter 6: The God Tax

Let's talk about one of the heaviest, most guilt-ridden topics in faith: money.

The tithe. Ten percent. The God Tax.

If you've spent any time in church, you know the drill. It's often presented as the dues you pay to be in the God Club. But that whole model is built on a misunderstanding. The "tithe" as we know it comes from the Old Testament, a specific rule for a specific time. It was never meant to be a universal fee for a global "God Club."

This doesn't square with Dad. He isn't running a club with a cover charge; He's invited us into a family. The Royal Family.

And this is where everything changes. We absolutely have to give back. It's our responsibility. Dad has blessed us, and we have to honor Him. The key is understanding why we give.

This isn't our money. This is the royal money. These aren't just dollars in our bank account; these are the crown jewels. Our job is to share it with the world. We just do it differently. We don't pay a tax. We practice generosity.

For me, that means I'd rather give the cash in my pocket to a homeless man than worry about funding an institution with gold chalices. My giving isn't about a percentage; it's about paying attention to the nudge of the King.

When I pull up to a guy on a corner and feel that pull to help, I don't whip out my phone's calculator, figure out the exact contents of my wallet, and say, "Hang on, buddy, let me just calculate ten percent of this for you." That's insane. I just give what I feel called to give.

Sometimes that nudge is personal, like with my friend Ed. He was homeless, and our friendship grew over years. I'd help him with gas money, track down car parts, whatever he really needed. If I could do it, I would. That wasn't a donation; it was distributing the family's wealth.

Other times, the nudge comes through a TV screen. I'll see a commercial for St. Jude's. I'm a dad myself. My heart breaks for those kids and their families. So I give what I can. It's not guilt; it's empathy. It's a prince of the kingdom using the royal money to care for the kingdom's children.

Sometimes that generosity is a quiet, steady thing. And other times, as you'll see in the next chapter, it's a lightning bolt moment where you find yourself giving everything you have to a stranger in a parking lot.

That's the real story. Dad isn't after a slice of our income. He's inviting us to act like the royalty we are. He's not asking for a transaction; He's asking us to manage the family fortune with His heart.

So forget the God Tax. It's a ghost story.

There are no dues. There's just a King who has handed you a key to the treasury and said, "Go show the world how generous our family is."

Chapter 7: The Angel in the Parking Lot

Sometimes, the way Dad gets our attention is by letting some son of a bitch steal our parking spot.

I had to go to Walmart one day with the family. For some reason, before we left the house, I had this weird nudge to grab an envelope of cash I had set aside for the electric bill. I have no idea why. I didn't usually carry that much cash, but I grabbed it and stuck it in my pocket.

We get to the parking lot, and it's a zoo. I finally see a spot opening up, I put my blinker on, I wait... and some guy in another car just whips in and steals it right from under me. I lost it. I was yelling, screaming, giving him the finger—the whole nine yards. I was furious. After circling around for another five minutes, fuming the whole time, I finally found another spot at the far end of the lot.

I get out of the car, still muttering, and start walking toward the store with my family. Just as we get to the entrance, a little old lady steps in front of me. She looks tired, and her voice is shaky.

"Sir," she says, "I just need two dollars to get my medicine. I don't have any money."

And in that instant, all the anger just... vanished. It was like a switch flipped. I remembered the envelope in my pocket.

"Yes," I said. Of course, yes.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out a bill, handing it to her. Her eyes welled up. She told me she only needed two dollars, that this was too much. She was crying, so thankful, telling me she was living in her car and had been praying that God would send someone to help her get her medicine.

Hearing her story, seeing her need, something inside me just broke open. This wasn't about two dollars. This was about showing her she was seen. That she was valued. That the King's treasury was open to her.

I pulled out another bill, a much bigger one, and pressed it into her hand. "Please," I said. "Get some gas. Get a real meal. It's hot out here."

She was sobbing now, completely overwhelmed. And I knew what I had to do. I just took out the whole envelope—the entire electric bill money—and gave it to her.

I'm not telling you this story to get any credit. I'm telling you because it was the day I understood how the Father really works. I was the furthest thing from a saint in that moment. I was an angry, cussing mess. But Dad used my anger. He used the stolen parking spot to delay me. He used my weird nudge to grab that envelope. He put me on a collision course with a woman who was praying for a miracle, and He put the answer to her prayer right in my pocket.

That day, I was her angel. But I was only the delivery guy. The timing, the money, the setup—that was all Him. He doesn't wait for us to be perfect. He just needs us to be present. And sometimes, He'll even use a stolen parking spot to make sure we are.

Chapter 8: Is This Desk an Altar?

I'm going to be honest with you. I've struggled to write this chapter.

There's a popular idea in Christian circles that our work should be an act of worship. That our desk, or our truck, or our workshop should be an altar. It sounds really nice. It sounds holy. But if I'm being real, it's never felt that way for me.

My work has always just felt like... work.

It's how I pay the bills. It's the thing I do between the hours of 9 and 5 so I can live my real life afterward. I've always kept it separate from my relationship with my Dad. One is business, the other is family. And I'm starting to wonder if I'm wrong about that. I'm starting to think that maybe I'm the one who needs to learn this lesson. Maybe you feel that way, too.

So, I started asking the Guy in the Passenger Seat about it. "Dad," I'd say on my way to a job, "what do you think about this? What do you think about my work?"

I didn't get a booming voice from heaven. But as I started looking through our family story—the Bible—I started noticing things I'd never seen before.

First, Dad is a worker. The very first thing we learn about Him in Genesis is that He's a Creator. He designed, He built, He planted a garden. He got His hands dirty. He didn't just snap His fingers; He worked for six days, and then He looked at what He'd made and said, "This is good." He takes pride in good work.

Then I looked at our Brother, Jesus. He wasn't a priest or a professional religious guy for most of His life. He was a carpenter. He swung a hammer, He sweat, He got splinters. He spent years doing ordinary, manual labor.

If work was just a meaningless distraction, why would they both do it?

That's when a new idea started to click for me. Maybe worship isn't just about singing songs on Sunday. Maybe doing a job with integrity and excellence—even a job that feels completely "un-spiritual"—is its own kind of song. Maybe showing up on time, not cutting corners, and treating your coworkers with basic human decency is an act of worship that honors the Father who gave you the strength to do it in the first place.

Maybe the paycheck I get isn't just my money. Maybe it's a tangible hug from my Dad, His way of saying, "I'm taking care of you, kid." Seeing it as His provision, not just my earning, changes the whole feeling of clocking in.

I'm not saying I have this all figured out. I still have days where work is just a grind. But I'm starting to see it differently. I'm starting to see my workplace not as a separate, godless world, but as another place

where my Dad is right there with me. A place where I can show people a little bit of His character, not by preaching, but just by being a good man who does a good job.

Maybe the desk is an altar, after all. Not because of some magic prayer we say over it, but because it's a place where we can quietly honor our Father with the work of our hands. I'm still learning. But it's an interesting thought, isn't it?

Chapter 9: The Bridge

We have a Dad.

He's as royal as royalty can be. He's the King of the Universe. And He's our Father. Imagine that.

But if He loves us so much, why is there a canyon between us? Why was a bridge even necessary? Did He put the separation there?

This is the question that haunts us from the very beginning. It goes all the way back to a garden and a tree. Why would a loving Father put a tree in the middle of paradise and say, "Don't eat from it"? Was it a trap? Was He setting us up to fail?

I don't think so. I think it was about love.

Imagine you could build a robot and program it to say, "I love you," every ten seconds. It always obeys. It never talks back. Does that robot actually love you? No. It can't. It's just running a program. For love to be real, it has to be a choice. Without the possibility of "no," the "yes" is meaningless.

The Father didn't want robots. He wanted a family. He wanted sons and daughters who would choose to love Him, choose to trust Him. For that choice to be real, the option to not choose Him had to exist. The tree was that option. It was the physical representation of choice.

And we chose to walk away. We chose to believe we knew better. And in that choice, we created the canyon. The separation wasn't a punishment He inflicted; it was the natural consequence of us turning away from the source of all Life and Light. He didn't put the canyon between us. We did.

So there He was, the heartbroken Father, standing on one side of a canyon He never wanted, looking at the children He loves, lost on the other side. He could have left us there in the mess we made.

But He didn't. He came up with a rescue plan. A heartbreaking, beautiful, and brutal plan. He sent His Son, our Brother, Jesus, to become the bridge.

But He didn't build it with wood or stone. He built it with His own body. And we need to look, really look, at what that cost.

It started the night before. The betrayal. The sham trials. Then came the fists. Imagine the sound of a punch landing on a blindfolded man's face, the snap of cartilage, the grunt of pain. Imagine grown men spitting on Him, laughing as they did it.

Then they took Him to be scourged. This wasn't a simple whipping. It was a Roman flagrum—a whip with multiple leather straps embedded with shards of bone and bits of metal. Imagine the sound of it whistling through the air, followed by the wet, tearing sound as it hit His back. The first lash would have cut through the skin. The next would have ripped into the muscle. Again, and again, and again, until His back was a shredded, unrecognizable pulp of bleeding tissue.

But they weren't done. They mocked Him. They shoved a crown of long, thick, razor-sharp thorns onto His head, grinding it into His scalp. Imagine the feeling of dozens of thorns piercing your skin, the warm blood matting your hair and running down your face.

They made Him carry His own instrument of execution on His raw, bleeding shoulders until He collapsed. And then they threw Him down onto it. They stretched out His arms and drove thick, iron spikes through His wrists, shattering bone and severing nerves. Imagine the scream, the white-hot, blinding pain. They did the same to His feet.

They raised the cross and dropped it into a hole, the jolt sending waves of excruciating agony through every nerve in His body. And there He hung, for hours. Every breath was a battle. To exhale, He had to push up on the nails in His feet, scraping His shredded back against the rough, splintered wood.

And in the middle of all that, He felt something worse than the nails, worse than the thorns. He felt the Father turn away. For the first and only time in all of eternity, He was utterly alone, buried under the weight of our sin. And He screamed it out for all to hear: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

That was the moment. That was the payment. He endured hell so we wouldn't have to.

For a long time, I understood this in my head. But I never understood it in my heart until I lost my own daughter.

I know what it's like to watch something you created die right in front of you. I know the feeling of absolute helplessness, the agony that rips your soul apart. There is nothing comparable.

And in her final moments, I had to do the hardest thing I've ever done. I leaned in, and I told her it was okay to go home. I was giving her back.

In that moment, I got a glimpse—just a tiny, fractured glimpse—of what the Father must have felt. To watch His Son, His perfect Son, be tortured and killed. To have to "give Him back" for our sake. The fact that He was willing to endure that pain, and that Jesus was willing to accept it, all for me... all for you... it breaks me every time I think about it.

My pain helps me understand His. And His sacrifice helps me make sense of my own.

He didn't do this to start a religion. He did it to bring His brothers and sisters home. He is the bridge, built of a love so strong it was willing to endure the ultimate heartbreak. And He's standing on it right now, showing you the nail scars in His hands, waiting to walk you across.

Chapter 10: Coming Home

We've walked a long road together in this book. We've torn down the old, scary pictures of God and met the Dad who throws a party instead of a trial. We've met the Brother who became a bridge, built of His own body, just to get us back to the family.

We've come to the end of the story. But for you, it might be the beginning.

Maybe as you've been reading, a part of you has felt a deep sense of longing. A feeling of, "I want that. I want that kind of relationship. I want that kind of Father." But maybe there's another voice, a quieter one, that whispers, "But that's for other people. That's not for me. My mess is too big. The canyon is too wide."

If that's you, then this last chapter is for you. This is your invitation.

You might think you are a peasant standing outside the castle walls, but the truth is, you are lost royalty. You were born to be a part of this family. The Father has been looking for you your whole life. The party we've been talking about? It's for you. There is a seat at the table with your name on it.

So how do you get in? How do you cross the bridge?

It's not about being good enough. It's not about cleaning up your act first. It's not about following a new set of rules. It's simply about accepting the gift that has already been paid for. It's about taking the hand of the One who is waiting for you on the bridge.

Accepting Jesus isn't about joining a religion. It's the single most relational act you will ever make. It's looking at our Brother, seeing the nail scars in His hands, and saying, "Yes. I believe you did that for me. I need you. I want to come home."

There are no magic words. This isn't a religious ritual. It's a conversation from your heart to His. Right here, right now. It can be as simple as this:

"Dad. Father. I've been trying to do this on my own, and I'm tired. I see now that you're not the angry judge I thought you were. You're a loving Father who wants me home.

I believe your Son, my Brother, Jesus, built the bridge for me. I believe He took my mess so I could have your love. I accept His gift. I want to cross the bridge. I want to come home.

Please, take my life and show me what it means to be part of the family."

If you just prayed that, and you meant it in your heart, then everything has changed. The angels in heaven are throwing a party. The hallway is gone. The door has swung wide open.

And your Dad is running towards you, a smile on His face, ready to throw His arms around you and say those words you were always meant to hear:

“What took you so long? Damn, I missed you, buddy.”

Welcome home.

Epilogue: An Invitation for the Curious Heart

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So, our journey together in this book is coming to a close. I've shared my story and the picture of the Dad who throws a party instead of a trial. My deepest hope is that you've felt a pull to come home.

Maybe you're already there. Maybe you've taken that step, and the party is just getting started for you. If so, I couldn't be happier. Welcome to the family.

But maybe a part of you is still lingering on the other side of the bridge. Your heart might be leaning in, but your head is still full of questions, whispering, "It's a beautiful story, but is it real?" If you're someone who needs to explore, to understand, to see for yourself—I get it. And I believe the Dad we've been talking about gets it, too.

He isn't intimidated by our questions. He made our minds just as He made our hearts. So, for those of us who are wired to seek, I believe He's left clues. This final thought is an invitation to explore one of them.

I'd invite you to look into the Shroud of Turin.

If you've never heard of it, it's an ancient linen cloth that bears the faint image of a man. But it's the details of that image that are staggering. The man was whipped by a Roman flagrum, his scalp is punctured from a cap of thorns, his wrists and feet are pierced by nails, and there is a wound in his side consistent with a Roman spear thrust. It's a direct, point-by-point forensic match to the unique crucifixion of Jesus described in the Bible.

My invitation is simply to get curious. Don't take one person's opinion—not the skeptics', and not even mine. Start your own journey of discovery. Look at it from all sides. You'll find articles claiming it's a medieval forgery, often pointing to a 1988 carbon-dating test. Then you'll find research from scientists arguing that the test was flawed, done on a patch used to repair the cloth after a fire.

The deeper you go, the more you'll find a mystery that science struggles to explain. You'll learn that the image is a perfect photographic negative, created centuries before photography. That it contains 3D data, encoding the distance from the cloth to the body. That it was formed by a powerful burst of light—a type of radiation that colored the very top fibers of the linen without scorching it.

There is no known process, ancient or modern, that can replicate it.

This, for me, is where the head and the heart come together. That unexplainable burst of light feels like the echo of the Resurrection. It feels like the Dad, knowing some of His kids need to see, leaving behind an impossible artifact. A love letter to the curious mind.

So, I invite you: go on a journey of discovery. Be open. Be honest. Follow the evidence where it leads. See for yourself if the mystery of the man on the cloth points back to the Dad we've been talking about all along. The door is always open. I hope you decide to come home.