

## LESSON ONE

### Does God Love Me Like A Good Parent?

## Overview

*I* am confident that the relationship you have with your earthly father is not perfect. For most of us, our fathers have revealed truths to us about their humanness and flaws that have left us wanting. They are people, after all. Men who make decisions based on things other than love. Things like upbringing, insecurity, pride, and brokenness. And because we have been directly affected by our father's choices, whether they are in our lives or not, we are sometimes wounded and scarred by their behavior.

I believe that for some of us, the idea of God being a loving Father is tough to wrap our minds around. If we have not had a loving relationship with our father, perhaps we struggle to identify with the warm arms that comfort us when we hurt and receive us back into a relationship when we've wandered off. Maybe for us, it is easier to identify with judgment, punishment, or absence. If we think of God as a father and align that thinking with our human understanding of our father, then maybe a relationship with God doesn't sound all that enticing. It certainly may not seem safe or protective.

I want to invite you to let go of any preconceived idea you have based on your earthly father and consider embracing a new understanding of a loving parent. A parent who is always everything He is supposed to be and more. The Greek word translated to Father in **Matthew 6:9** means an originator and

author. He is about infusing the best of Him into you. He is a teacher—the favorite kind that you still think of and realize how their investment in you grew and changed you. He is the one who holds you up when life is threatening to pull you under.

*God holds you  
secure when life  
threatens to pull  
you under.*

Massachusetts native Dick Hoyt is an example of an amazing father. His son, Rick, has cerebral palsy. Over the past four decades, Rick and Dick have together completed marathons and triathlons to encourage others by showing how disability does not prevent one from living a meaningful life. Rick could do nothing for himself. So Dick, even into his seventies, pushed him in a wheelchair, carried him in a seat on the front of his bicycle, and pulled him in a boat as they completed these competitive races. The videos of the two of them together are inspiring. I encourage you to seek one out and watch it.

Dick is an earthly father and undoubtedly deals with his shortcomings, so I do not hold him up as an illustration of perfection. I do use his example to point out a few things I think we all desire in a loving parent.

**We long to believe we matter.** It was at the son's request that the duo entered their first charity race to raise money for a local athlete who became paralyzed in an accident. Rick's father heard his child's plea and responded to it because he loves Rick. What matters to the child matters to the father. Then, as years passed, the father continued to pour into the child until it became difficult to distinguish where one stopped and the other one began.

**We long to receive help where we can't go it alone.** Rick's abilities are limited, but Dick's strength is greater than Rick's. When the

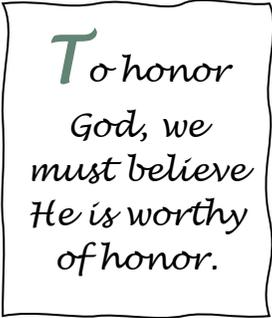
child confronts his limitations, the father bends down, picks him up, and carries him so that he can continue moving towards the finish line.

**We long to know we are unconditionally loved.** Dick understands that Rick will never be able to pay him back for what he's done for him. It has never been, nor ever will be about reciprocation. The father loves the child, desires a relationship with the child, and will sacrificially meet the child wherever that child is while delighting in the love the child offers in return.

As we journey through this first week of closer examination of The Lord's Prayer, we will focus on the first statement, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,"

**Matthew 6:9.** To approach God as a parent we desire to honor, we need to understand better what about Him is worth honoring. It has nothing to do with our own undoubtedly imperfect earthly parental relationships. Instead, it has everything to do with the perfect love He showers down upon us. To our

heavenly Father, we do matter; He is a constant helper, and His arms are always ready to envelop us in a loving embrace.



*To honor  
God, we  
must believe  
He is worthy  
of honor.*

Let's get started.

## DAY ONE

### What Is A Good Parent?

*I* am the mom of two boys. One day after a parenting misstep, I was overwhelmed by the possibility my actions could be ruining my children. Deep in fear and anxiety over this, I said to my husband, “I cannot live with myself if I fail at this job.” Well, guess what? I have and do fail my children. From time to time, I put my needs before theirs, I hurt them out of my brokenness, or I yell at them when I get scared or impatient. I am imperfect, and I fail.

But I am also a good mother. I know and love my children well. I am quick to say I’m sorry when I’ve messed up. I am generous with words of love, affirmation, and encouragement. When I am “winning” at mothering, it isn’t because of anything I pull from my resources. It is because I take a deep breath and remember the parent in the example of my perfect Parent.

I believe the most profound desire we all have is to be known and loved. If we received that from our parents, it blessed us in an abundance of ways, and hopefully, we recognize them. If we did not receive this from our parents, it hinders us, and we have a choice to make. We can push those feelings of rejection down and cover the longing with something else. Or we can acknowledge the gap between what we needed and what we received and learn to invite God in to be the gap-filler.

*The most profound desire in all of us is to be known and loved.*

Most of us are not entirely in one camp or the other. We are on a continuum. Consider for a moment your relationship with your earthly parents. They might be biological or adoptive, living or

deceased. It doesn't matter. Whoever parented or were supposed to parent you, where would you say you fall on this continuum of feeling unquestionably loved and supported by them?



The apostle Paul gives us a list of qualities that demonstrate love. Take a moment and read **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** and write down the qualities of love you find there.

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Now, is there a quality or two in this list that makes you pause because you know your heart especially feels like that is or was missing in your parental relationships? Pick the one that stands out the most, and write it here.

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For me, I pause on the phrase in verse seven that reads “bears all things” in the NASB. In other versions, it reads “is always supportive,” “puts up with all things,” and “never gives up.” It is an understanding that love remains stable regardless of what comes for the relationship to weather.

A phrase I often use with my boys when we've hit something rough is, “It doesn't change the love.” We know what the statement means for us. I might be angry or disappointed, and there might be

consequences. But it doesn't touch the love I have for them. It cannot. Whatever road we journey together, we will deal with the obstacles. It might get hard. We might disagree. But at least on my part, it does not change the truth that I love them.

God loves us this way. Far better than this way even. No matter what, His love for us does not change.

Read **Romans 8:38-39**. What can separate us from God's love?

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Read **Ephesians 2:4-5**. Even when does God love us?

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Read **Psalms 136:1**. How long does God's love endure?

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One more, look up **Jeremiah 31:3**. God declares He loves us with what kind of love?

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No matter what kind of relationship or experiences we have had with earthly parent figures, it does not change, affect, or corrupt the abiding love God has for us. No matter what we have done or will do, God's love is constant. He is a parent deserving our honor and submission.

Believing in and receiving God's love is a process for most of us. If

*Nothing can  
change, affect,  
or corrupt the  
ever-present love  
God has for you.*

you have a hard time trusting in the depths of His love for you, that's okay. I encourage you to admit to Him how you struggle with it. Ask Him to open your heart to the revelation of His passionate love for you. He wants to demonstrate His love for you and can do it in a way you will see and feel. Keep your eyes open for how He is making you more

aware of His presence and His love for you in everyday situations.

*Father God, You know everything about who I am, where I've been, and what I've experienced. You know where I struggle to receive love. Help me today to be less guarded and more open to how You love me. I want to be loved. I want to be loved by You. Amen.*

May God bless you as you seek Him.

Peace.

## DAY TWO

### Is God In My Corner?

One of the schools I attended in my growing up years was within walking distance of our home. Most days, I went to and from school on my own. But when the weather was unpleasant, my father would drive me. One cloudy day after school, I took off walking towards home and got caught in a rainstorm. I was soaking wet by the time I made my way along the side of the house to enter through the back door. As I rounded the corner, I saw the taillights of my father's car at the end of our street. I'm sure he had looked up from his work, noticed dark clouds, and decided to find me on my route home to save me from walking the whole way in the rain.

Suddenly, it was more than the rain cascading down upon me. It was also fear. My father was leaving to pick me up, but I was already at home. I dropped my book bag, began to scream for him, and ran as fast as my short legs would carry me in the pouring rain; I waved my hands and tried to get him to see me. When I realized there was no way to catch up to him, I collapsed on the gravel road, sobbing.

The memory of that afternoon remains solid in my mind. I don't remember how the situation resolved itself, but I clearly remember how I felt to realize I was wet, cold, locked out of the safety of my home, and unable to get the help I desperately wanted.

Maybe you can identify with those feelings in your relationships—locked out from safety, alone, misunderstood, overlooked, or unanswered. It can be exceptionally heartbreaking if those feelings are identifiable in your parental relationships. It can be difficult not only to believe that God loves us, but also that He is for us. Does

He see what we need? And if He does, does He help us when and where we need the help?

We're going to look today at a Bible story in **John 8** about a woman caught in adultery. I believe her heart posture was much like my circumstance as I stood in the pouring rain. Was this my fault or a result of conditions over which I had little control? Did I deserve to be out in the cold without protection, or should someone stronger have been taking better care of me? Would I be punished, or would I be forgiven?

At the beginning of this story, we find Jesus working. His teaching during a religious feast had the church leaders in an uproar. Jesus' words were threatening because they suggested that following the Law did not mean one was right with God. The men of religious status who taught the Law consistently sought ways to discredit Jesus and maintain their power over the people. On this day, they chose to bring a woman to test Him.

Read **John 8:1-11** and write brief answers to a few questions that unfold this story.

What do they catch the woman doing?

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Where do the men make her stand?

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What do the religious leaders want to do to her?

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The story says the men persist in questioning Jesus until He finally tells the group that they can go ahead and stone her. But He adds an important stipulation: The one who is sinless can throw the first stone at her.

One by one, the men leave the court until Jesus and this woman are alone. I wonder what she was thinking. Did she look into His eyes? Did she bow at His feet? Maybe she loved the man with whom she was having sex when they caught her. Maybe she was selling herself to survive. Perhaps the whole thing had been set up for the arrogant, pompous religious leaders to have some sort of bait to dangle in front of Jesus. We don't know. We do know they stood alone together. Her nakedness. His move.

She would learn that day that Jesus was in her corner. He saved her from death when people were using her as a pawn in their game. And He saved her from death when He invited her into a life free from condemnation and shame.

I don't know how this interaction with Jesus changed her life when she left the temple courtyard. But I do know how knowing Jesus is in my corner has changed mine. I used to go through life with a heart posture much like the little girl I was in the pouring rain that day—afraid, fearing consequences, lonely, and feeling like I was on the outside and couldn't get in. But I have stood in the center court and felt the presence of Jesus scattering the enemy that threatened. Many times, He has leaned down close to me to say, "You can get up now, my child. There's nothing they can do to you when I'm in your corner."

*Father God, sometimes the voices of rejection and criticism are so loud. Memories from the past collide with current situations, and the weight of it all crushes me. I feel like a little girl running through the rain begging for someone to see me, but no one does. Help me to remember that You see me. You know what I need even better than I do, and You stand with me in the storm and confusion, offering Your helping hand to pull me through. Open my heart to believe in You and stand firm in You. Amen.*

May God bless you as you seek Him.

Peace.

## DAY THREE

### What If I Have Rejected His Love?

Sometimes we reject the love and security God offers us. We probably all know the feeling of rejection. I remember the ending of a long-term relationship with a man I dated while we were in college. We had grown apart, were living in different cities, and had been having conversations about not staying together. But then I got scared about moving forward without him. One night when we were talking on the phone, I told him I had a change of heart, and I wanted to try to make things better again. But it was too late. He wasn't interested in trying to fix the pieces that didn't work anymore, and we ended things permanently that night.

Later, when I was retelling the story to a friend, I admitted how hard I had tried to hang on to him. I had laid it all on the line and asked for him to give our relationship another chance. And then I said out loud the words that cut so deeply, "But he didn't want me."

*God unceasingly,  
unashamedly  
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with you.*

Over and over again, God lays it all on the line for us. He loves us well and fiercely. He continually calls us back to Him. He relentlessly pursues us when we've wandered off. He unashamedly professes His desire to be in relationship with us even when we ignore Him or look upon His declarations with disgust.

Today we're going to take a peek into a fascinating story in the Old Testament book of Hosea. It might strengthen your heart a bit if

you know you haven't treated God with the loving response He deserves and wonder what that means for you moving forward.

Hosea was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the mid-700s B.C. The name Hosea means "salvation," which is also the meaning of the related biblical names of Isaiah, Joshua, and Jesus. Hosea is given a curious directive from the Lord to take a prostitute for his wife and have children with her (**Hosea 1:2**). Gomer is the name of the prostitute Hosea marries.

After some time of being married to and having children with Hosea, Gomer leaves to return to an adulterous lifestyle. Hosea is told by God to bring Gomer back again, so he finds her and repurchases her after she has become a slave. Gomer has rejected Hosea, her savior. But Hosea seeks her, finds her, and restores their relationship.

In the story of Hosea and Gomer, God is painting a picture of His love for His people. As unfaithful as we are, He continues to love us. Though we reject Him, He buys us with a price. And even though, left to our own devices, we often choose slavery over freedom, He continues to ask us to allow Him to remove the chains that bind us.

The only thing we know about Gomer's response to Hosea is that she leaves him. Read **Hosea 3:1**. God tells Hosea to love an adulterous woman again. God compares this love to His love for what people?

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He loves them, even though they turn to what?

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Your version of the Bible may say they loved raisin cakes or fruit cakes. This food was often used in feasts of pagan worship, indicating that God's people were actively celebrating and enjoying their worship of other gods and idols. They turned away from Him, rejected His love, and consequences were coming because of their choices. Yet even while God declared a coming judgment, He also issued a restorative promise.

Read **Hosea 2:19-20**. What are some of the words God uses to describe how He will treat His people even though they reject Him?

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And what does it say we will be able to do after He marries us?

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The Amplified Bible says, "Then we will know (recognize, appreciate) the Lord [and respond with loving faithfulness]." Friend, no matter what else you have turned to instead of God or how hard you have worked to get away from Him, your rejection of Him cannot outdo His love for you. He chose you when you weren't interested in Him and purchased you for Himself. The only thing He asks of us is that we offer our heart to Him as it is and allow Him to bind it up, repair and restore it, and open it up to the depth of His love for us.

*Father, You parent me with reckless abandon. Even when I fight for separation from You, You stay close in anticipation of the moment I*

*will turn back and cry out to You. Thank You for Your watchful eye, Your patience, and Your compassion on me. Too often I try to make my own way and do things myself, and I want to change. I want to resist You less and embrace You more. Thank You for Your love. Amen.*

May God bless you as you seek Him.

Peace.

## DAY FOUR

### What If My Mistakes Are Big?

*I*'ve had my years of wandering. My story of squandering God's love and turning my back on His grace has taken two different forms so far in my life.

First, in my late teenage years, I behaved in a manner unrestrained when it came to boys. The "why" behind these decisions is ridiculously obvious to my middle-aged self, but at the time, I only knew I hurt, and attention from men lessened the pain. It took years for me to link my reckless choices with abuse in my background. When I was a high school student, I was groomed and seduced into a romantic relationship with one of my teachers. After it ended, I was traumatized, wounded, and ashamed. My brokenness and attention from men were a deadly combination. For a time, I wasn't very selective about who I went out with or who I went home with. I am so grateful to God, who looked upon His lost child and kept me from most of the damage I invited into my life.

Later, in my twenties and thirties, I was legalistic. I knew I had made wrong choices, and I was determined to make up for them by adhering to religious standards that I believed made me acceptable. I held my hand up to God's grace, somehow believing I'd already used up too much of it, and I needed to prove myself worthy by demonstrating how good I could be now. Again, it took me a long time to understand I was just as desperate for His grace in my attempts to be a good church girl as I was in the days I was looking for love in the arms of a stranger.

Maybe your mistakes are big, too. I've listened to a lot of confessions and secrets during my years in ministry, and I

sometimes think nothing else will surprise me. Then something else does. Why? Because we make big mistakes sometimes—mistakes that make our world look unrecognizable, rock our stability, and damage our relationships. We say what we promised we wouldn't and do what we didn't think we were capable of doing. And then when the dust settles and our eyes scan our new reality, we wonder if God's grace is big enough for even this.

Let's hear an empathetic word from the apostle Paul. Read **Romans 7:15-20**. What is the problem Paul is describing?

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Now read **James 1:14-15**. Where does James say sin begins?

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We all face temptation. Sometimes our sinful desires are deep inside us, and by the time they reach our actions, they are well-disguised as gifts and services. We reach out with hands to serve others, but we are really serving ourselves as we coddle our pride by attempting to gain the admiration of humanity. Other times, our evil desires are less camouflaged. We wanted, we took, we got caught, and now live with the consequences.

In **Luke 15:11-32**, Jesus paints a picture for us of how a loving Father deals with a rebellious, sinful, ungrateful child. A child who squandered the gifts lavished upon him because hunger pains cried out for instant gratification.

Here's the situation. A wealthy father has two sons, and the younger one asks for his inheritance money early. No sooner than the transfer of funds is completed, the child goes wild. He spends the money on women and parties and ends up destitute. When he

finally hits rock bottom, he decides he will go back to his father and beg for mercy.

My time of covering shame with male attention happened during my early days of college. For a short but way-too-long time, I was dating three men simultaneously. One afternoon when I was filing papers and answering the phone at my student work job, the co-worker I was dating stopped in to say hello. While we were chatting, one of the other men, who had asked me out because I had assisted him through my work, stepped into the office to check on the progress of some paperwork. As I was growing increasingly anxious, I saw in my line of sight the third man. He was conversing with another co-worker of mine, our mutual friend who had introduced us.

If your head is having a hard time following this scenario, just imagine what my head was doing. A friend of mine who understood the enormity of this situation swooped in and saved me from the third man's attention. My co-worker who had stepped in first went back to his work, and after the man whose paperwork needed checking had left the office, I went into a filing room devoid of people, sank to the floor, and wept. What was I doing? How had I become what I had become?

Read **Luke 15:20**. When the rebellious son returns to his father, how does his father respond?

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Maybe this is not how your parents have dealt with the mistakes you have made. But the way God receives the wayward child in the story is precisely the way He parents us. He stands watching and waiting for us to become visible on the horizon as we take steps towards home.

It moves me to tears to think of the times I have, head-down and weary, walked towards my Father. Every time I summon the courage to raise my head to look for Him, I see that He waits in hopeful anticipation of my return. He doesn't care that He looks foolish for welcoming me back home—quite the opposite. He jumps up and down in jubilee and shouts for people to stop what they're doing to join Him in celebration. Your Father is waiting for you, too. He stands with arms ready to throw you around and lips longing to kiss you in sweet relief that you are with Him again.

*God welcomes you back home without evaluating how it will affect His reputation.*

*Heavenly Father, I have messed up. In so many ways, I have squandered what You have given me. I have squandered the loving relationship You continually offer me. Sometimes I stay away out of fear that You will provide me with what I deserve. Thank You for reminding me through this story that I can always come home. Amen.*

May God bless you as you seek Him.

Peace.

## DAY FIVE

### What Does My Father Want From Me?

Let's now go back to the main reason we have spent the past few days considering the role of our heavenly parent. The first line of the Lord's Prayer says, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (**Matthew 6:9**). In the CEV, the same verse reads, "Help us to honor your name." The Greek word translated to hallowed and honor is *hagiazō*, and it means "to make holy, purify, consecrate, or sanctify."

If we acknowledge God as a good parent, we will seek to honor Him with our lives. If we trust that He wants what is best for us, we will bless Him with our obedience. If we believe that God loves us with an everlasting, unconditional love, we will speak to Him from our authentic hearts and listen to both His affirmation and correction.

The book of Hosea gives a clear answer to what God wants from us. Read **Hosea 6:6**. What does God desire?

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What does God not want from us?

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That doesn't mean God doesn't want sacrifices and offerings from us. It does mean He wants those things to flow from a heart that is devoted to Him and seeks to honor Him. He is not interested in a heart that is going through religious rituals void of significance. When my father retired from over four decades of pastoral ministry, people gathered to honor him. They brought cards, told

stories, and stood in a long line to thank him for his service. He has served hundreds of people in a dozen or more communities, and his impact on the spiritual lives of people was evident. With a couple of hours of their time that afternoon, they came together to let my father know his love for them had impacted their lives, and they were grateful.

In a way, this is what God wants from us. Not a cake, a scrapbook, or a basket for cards and letters. But an acknowledgment with our life that we recognize and appreciate the love He lavishes upon us. We do this by giving our time to get to know Him better and sharing our gifts to bless others. We honor Him by confessing our missteps and sharing our testimonies. We show our devotion to Him by realizing the many ways He demonstrates His faithfulness through quiet work in our lives.

Read **1 John 5:3**. How do we demonstrate love for God?

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Now read **Matthew 22:37-40**. What is Jesus' reply when He is asked about the greatest commandment?

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Friend, we honor God by loving Him, loving others, and loving ourselves. When we make our life choices in alignment with these commands, everything else falls into place. When we do not, we can admit where we've made mistakes, look back to where we've come from, and see the Father waiting for us to return to Him. The enemy will work to convince you that God doesn't love you. It's a favorite lie of his to tell. He will point out places where it seems like God forgot or failed you, and he'll pierce you with those memories when you're sluggish in your faith. Now is an excellent

time to consider how you will respond when those doubts trickle in. I hope this week's work has reminded you how very much you are loved. How completely you are loved. And how, no matter what your earthly parent situation is or was like, God is a good and perfect parent who always knows and does what is best for you.

It is my hope that this week has been a balm on your heart—a reminder of all that God offers you, as He invites you into a deeper relationship with Him.

*Holy Father, thank You for Your love. Help me to show my gratitude for the many ways You care for me by knowing and following the example of Jesus Christ as I make daily decisions. Help me to love You, others, and myself with a heart that is devoted to You alone. Amen.*

May God bless you as you seek Him.

Peace.

## LESSON ONE

# Bringing It Together

This week's line of the Lord's Prayer:

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name*

—**Matthew 6:9**

This week's trust question:

Does God Love Me Like A Good Parent?

This week's answer:

God promises to love us with an everlasting love and eagerly waits for us to turn back to Him when we've made a mistake.

This week's lie to be aware of:

God's love is limited and will fail you the way human relationships do or have in the past.

Key verses that can help us overcome the lie:

**Jeremiah 31:3, Luke 15:20, Romans 8:38-39**

### A Love That Won't Let Go

A dear friend of mine had been in trouble with the law when she was in high school. Her life was not going to be forever altered by her mistake, but it was a huge red flag that she was heading in a dangerous direction. The behavior leading up to the incident had created a severe rift in her relationship with her father. He was a man of high regard in their church and community, she had publicly

embarrassed him, and she had no idea how to mend the broken pieces.

One day following a heated argument with him, she stormed away, determined to leave her parent's house, and not return. As she swung open the front door shouting hurtful words, her father caught her arm and pulled her into his embrace. She began to fight him and tried to break free, but as she fought him, he held her tighter. Like a boa constrictor, when she would wiggle a little bit of space, he would wrap his strong arms closer around her until she gave up her fighting and slumped into him feeling defeated.

Much to her surprise, when she ceased struggling, he loosened his grip but still held her from falling. As she hung her head down, waiting for his reprimand, he leaned close to her ear and whispered, "I will never let you go."

That's the way God loves us. Sometimes the fighting with Him will be painful. Sometimes we have worn ourselves out trying to break free. Sometimes we have hung our head in shame as we waited for Him to unleash on us His anger and disappointment. But in the moments when we stop our kicking and arguing, we hear His gentle reminder that we are His and He is ours. Nothing we do can separate us from that truth. And no matter what, He will never let us go.

May God bless you as you seek Him.

Peace.

## ***Lesson One Discussion Questions***

- 1) What is your definition of a good parent?
- 2) When have you experienced God's love for you?
- 3) What helps you believe that God is in your corner?
- 4) In what ways do we, as believers, reject God's love and grace for us?
- 5) Talk about what you think the prodigal son might have been feeling when he decided to return home to his father. What might he have felt about how his father received him?
- 6) How have you observed in yourself and others a desire to earn God's love rather than trusting it is always present and available?
- 7) When the temptation is present to doubt God's love, what are some ways we can remind ourselves that it is ever-present?