

Everlasting Father

Have you ever heard of the **US Orphan Trains**?

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, New York City had a problem – tens of thousands of homeless children. Widespread poverty and disease lead to a city overrun with orphans and unwanted children. That is until a minister had an idea: send them west.

So began the “orphan train.” At the time it was called “the placing out system” and it utilized any passenger train going in any direction, that offered reduced fares for children. At stops along the way, farmers and shopkeepers would come to the station, inspect the children and decide if any would be a good match for their families – or businesses.

Between 1854 and 1929, 250,000 children...orphans...were sent away on the orphan trains....right here in the USA....and done so by a minister. I am not sure what I think about that.

Many were immigrant children. Their families were in Europe and then their one parent in the USA died. They had left extended family in Ireland, Germany or Italy and when one parent died, then the children would have nowhere to go and they would be put in orphanages.”

Thus, the trains evolved as an economic solution for the city of New York. Those who started the “place out program” felt that this was the best solution for children. It relied on the kindness of strangers at train stops as an alternative to raising children in institutions, or kicking them out into the streets.

The outcomes were a mixed bag. At orphan train reunions, riders of the portable foster care system recounted their experiences to one another. For some, being chosen from a crowd and taken into a family was the moment their life began. For others, the only purpose they served for their new “family” was labor, for them it was a form of slavery.

The idea of loading trains with children and sending them west seems almost barbaric to me...But it was the best solution that they could come up with.

I am not sure that we have come up with anything better in the last 150 years. It seems no country has ever solved the problem of helping children who are orphaned. Many foster care children are neglected, used and abused. Orphanages didn't really work out very well. Adoption has not solved the problem either.

Today as we speak, at least 1.6 million children live on the streets in the US. Others live in homes with dysfunctional parents and are essentially living as orphans....often taking care of their parents.

I have been wondering why we are so ineffective caring for orphans. No society seems to have effectively dealt with this challenge. Epidemics, War, and Poverty continue to result in more and more orphaned children.

If all the orphans in the world formed their own country, they would have the 10th largest nation in the world. Most children who are orphaned 95% are over the age of 5.

Famous Orphans.....Malcomb X, Marilyn Monroe, Ella Fitzgerald, IceT, Ingrid Bergman, Babe Ruth, Edgar Allen Poe, Johann Bach, and Presidents Alexander Hamilton, Andrew Jackson and Herbert Hoover.

Those people are the ones we like to think about, but we see thousands of people who are products of the foster care system who are in prison, addicted to drugs, trafficked for sex, and trying to deal with serious psychiatric issues. Within 4 years of aging out of the foster care system over 60% have no annual income, or marketable skills.

Only 50% of children who are in foster care will be employed by the age of 24. 20% of them will become homeless after the age of 18

Fewer than 3% of children in foster care will go on to earn a college degree.

71% of young women who age out of the foster care system will become pregnant by the age of 21.

Risk of PTSD 5x, MDD 2x, Panic Disorder 3X, Alcoholism 2x, Drug Dependence 7x, Bulimia 7x

Every culture, every society, throughout all of human history have tried to address how to manage those without parents. Some have murdered them, some have sacrificed them to the gods, some have enslaved them, some have adopted them, and others have cared for them.

There is no doubt that children raised without loving and supportive parents really struggle. There is something deep within us that moves our hearts for orphans. It bad enough that they have lost the love and support of their parents but they are children, they are vulnerable, they are innocent, and they are often being abused and manipulated by those who are wicked.

When it comes to orphans...we all seem to get it....we all can identify with these children.

For some reason, it seems like there is a part of us that feels what they feel. It is easy for us to connect with their fear, anxiety, and loneliness.

There is something in our spirit that is kindred with them. You see we connect with those emotions because we all have been orphaned. Once Adam and Eve Sinned, the earth became on huge orphanage. Children separated from their Father being ravaged by the very sin they were to be protected from.

We are talking about orphans today because the entire Christmas Story is a story about rescuing orphans. Spiritual children separated from their Spiritual Father.

God's heart breaks for orphans. Throughout Scripture He repetitively instructs the Jewish people to care for the fatherless, the widows, the poor and the orphans.

That is why Isaiah's words brought so much hope....He will be called EVERLASTING FATHER

Isaiah 9:6–7 (ESV) — 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Isaiah wrote these words hundreds of years before Jesus was born. He speaks of a child born (human) a son given (Spirit) a new government or kingdom, and then he says that this person will be uniquely called 4 things.

1) His counsel will cause wonder and awe....He will be called Wonderful Counselor 2) He will be a conquering warrior but also will do things only God can do....He will clearly be a Mighty God. 3) He will be the Prince of Peace. Offering peace with God and the peace of God.....But now we turn to the last clue....He will be called Everlasting Father.

But notice a few things about these names.... Wonderful Counselor----He has a plan. Prince of Peace- His plan will result in our Peace with God. Mighty God- He has the power to carry out the plan Everlasting Father- He will see the plan through

Interesting that a Son is given but He will be called Father. Isaiah said that one of the ways we would identify this unique Messiah is that people would call this man.....Everlasting Father. Now you may be ready to check out right now.....Perhaps the idea of Father leaves you nauseous and the last thing you want to think about is your experience with your father becoming everlasting. In fact, from your perspective being orphaned might have been better than what you experienced with your father.

The Father wound is one of the most painful wounds we can experience. Many have a hard time seeing their Heavenly Father because of the pain caused by an earthly one. Many have been severely disappointed, hurt and perhaps abused by the only Father figure they ever knew. The concept of living with an Everlasting Father may be your definition of Hell.

You know what it means to be orphaned by your father- perhaps physically, perhaps emotionally or both. My prayer for you today is that you will be able to set those feelings aside long enough to see how God defines a Father. And if that is you, I am really sorry that your earthly Father has left such a deep and painful wound.

In fact, if you think about all the ways your earthly Father disappointed and hurt you, and then think about all you wished your Father would have been for you.....you are beginning to get a glimpse of the role God designed for fathers..

We all have within us, something very deep, a longing for a loving father, a father who protects us, provides for us, teaches us, guides us, encourages us, and is our greatest cheerleader.

So when God through Isaiah, spoke of a light coming into the darkness....a child being born.....a Son given....one of the ways that he said we would recognize this Messiah.....one of the things that would separate Him from every other human ever born.....is that people would call Him Everlasting Father.

Ok so....this one seems a bit lame. I mean Wonderful Counselor.....someone who teaches and advises us and we stand back in wonder.....that leave us in awe....Mighty God...all powerful....God on earth....stopping storms....raising the dead....healing the sick....wow that's unique. But Father? What is the big deal?

Half of Americans don't have a father in their home. Those that are there are often just a huge disappointment. Why did Isaiah list this.....of all the things God could have said about the Messiah....why is Everlasting Father in the final 4?

We tend to think that people in Biblical times are just like us only they live in the Middle East and are not as sophisticated. We think their definitions are just like ours. We imagine that when the term Father is mentioned that they too have been shaped by Homer Simpson....Tony Soprano....and Frank Costanza. .

So we must be very careful to understand what this term meant to them. Because Scripture is first and foremost to be interpreted based on what it meant to its original audience. .

Father

Following the universal tendency of men to think that things must always have been as they are now in our own lives, we can only too easily think that the people of the Old Testament differed from us only in the fact that they lived at an earlier time and in another part of the world.

But the question we must answer to be able to understand this name given to the Promised Child is this....."What did the people of Isaiah's day associate with the name Father?"We get some hint from Scripture.....

Deuteronomy 24:17–22 (ESV) — 17 "You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge, 18 but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. 19 "When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. 21 When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. 22 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.

They perceived the fatherless as those who were without protection and provision. SO it is clear that they see the Father as one who provided for and protected his family.

We also see from Scripture that the term father was also applied to Kings.

Isaiah 22:20–22 (ESV) — 20 In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, 21 and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him, and will commit your authority to his hand. And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

The King was to be a father to his people. To provide and to protect them. In addition, Elijah and Elisha were spiritual leaders of others and were both called father. So regardless of what we think when we hear the name Father, they saw the Father as their Spiritual Leader, their provider and their protector.

From nomadic times, a father's authority held the family group together in their encampment, and he became the symbol of their security. In ancient patriarchal societies, the father was an absolute master who had the power of life and death over family members, ruling with unchallenged authority.

However, he was also benevolent. Caring for them, instructing them, putting their needs and interests ahead of his own. Particularly in Jewish families. While the Father had the unchallenged leadership role, it also came with significant responsibilities and God's laws brought accountability.

What the Biblical Role of the Father in Jewish Families?

Provider

In the everyday affairs of a Hebrew household, it was the father's responsibility to maintain the family fortune and to be the provider. He might work in the fields, most probably with crops of flax, barley, or wheat. Or he would work at a trade, possibly as a weaver, builder, potter, dyer, fuller, or a worker in copper or bronze. If he lived near the shore, he might be a fisherman.

Protector

Not only was the Father responsible to provide for his family but he was also expected to be their protector. To guard those who are vulnerable and to make sure that every person in the family felt physically, emotionally and spiritually safe.

Priest

The father was also responsible for the religious well-being of the family. It was his duty to take over his sons' education from the mother at an early age, teaching them the tenets of Hebrew religion (Ex 10:2; 12:26; Dt 4:9; 6:7). He also explained all the facets of the law and the interwoven history of the nation.

Discipline

The father was the disciplinarian of the family, with the rod being used to drive home the lessons taught (Prv 13:24; 22:15; 29:15–17). Though children were loved and valued, they were not pampered.

Teacher

Education also took place within the precincts of the synagogue, and shortly before the time of Christ, a general elementary education was introduced. It was also imperative that a father teach his sons a trade, normally his own, for a man without a trade either starved or became a thief.

Matchmaker

Another important paternal responsibility was to provide wives for male offspring in the household. So when Isaiah said this child would be called a Father....it meant a lot more than just producing a child. While foreign to our concept of Family, Fathers, Wives and Family role dynamics, the term Father was very specific and carried with it serious responsibilities and expectations.

Even the relationship in which God presented Himself to His people, as their Father, would give peculiar strength and sacredness to the bond which connected earthly parents with their offspring.

People were living in shaky times, so they wanted something they could cling to. (Is that you?) And people in shaky times want someone they can depend on – a father-figure, if you will. So God promised them both in His son.

But look what happened when Jesus grew up: He care for people. Like a father does. He nurtured sick people back to health. Like a father does. He prayed for people. Like a father does. He was there for people. He was strong and dependable, like a father.

See, fathers, if they are to be anything in the lives of their children, ought to do certain things and hold certain places in their lives. For instance, fathers ought to believe in their children. Study the life of Jesus, and you'll find someone who believed in people. Fathers ought to be firm, but loving. Which is how Jesus handled people.

Fathers ought to provide a place out of which their children can derive an identity. So they can say, "I'm a Smith, and I come from a long line of Smiths. We know who we are." Jesus did that.

For 2 millennia followers of His have been saying, "I'm a Christian, and I am historically linked to generations of Christians all the way back to Christ." Fathers ought to be thinking about and planning for their children's future. In John 14:1, Jesus said, "I am going to prepare a place for you." – He was thinking about His kids' future.

Jesus was constantly shepherding.....in fact a shepherds heart is a father's heart. Nurture, Protect, Provide, Sacrifice, Guard, Support, were actions common to both a Shepherd and a Biblical Father.

Jesus has a Father's Heart. In fact, He says that His heart is identical to the Father's. "I and the Father are one." --

John 14:6-10 (ESV) Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?"

Hebrews 1:3 (ESV) "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word..."

We get glimpses into Jesus' Heart and His love for us.

Jesus is heading into Jerusalem ..He knows that His time is near....He is moving toward the Cross.....But as He crests the hill from Jerico to Jerusalem there is a place in the road that looks out over the city. Photo Jesus is emotionally crushed.....not because He is soon to be crucified, but because the city of Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders, and the very people He came to save were going to reject Him. The rebellion of His children was breaking His father's heart.

So you can imagine the pain Jesus must have felt when that message was rejected. He came to tell the Jewish people.....that they had a Father.....a Father who loved them....but they rejected Him. Listen to the heart behind his words.....this is a Father's heart breaking for His rebellious children

Luke 13:34–35 (ESV) — 34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35 Behold, your house is forsaken.

Jesus knew....that the sacrifice He was soon to make....would be rejected. Can you imagine how painful it would be to build safe home for orphans....to go to the orphans to tell them that there is a place for them there.....and they said....no. And not only said no, but killed the messenger?

Why is the Father wound so painful. Because deep within us....we know that is what is missing. We have been orphaned from our Spiritual Father since birth....because of Sin. Our spiritual deficit....is at the core a Father wound.

We long to be reconnect to our Father....we long to be protected, cared for and taught. Isaiah said that one of the ways we would recognize the Messiah is that He would be called Father. Why is that in the top 4? Because every one of us.....is an orphan.....looking for their Father.

When Adam and Eve Sinned....We were all separated from our Heavenly Father. We were all born as spiritual orphans. Vulnerable.....unprotected.... gullible....manipulated
...abused....scared.....afraid.....and longing to be rescued.....longing to someone fill the void..... You see our hearts break when we see orphans because it is one of our deepest longings....to be connected to the Father.

That is what Christmas is really about. This child that Isaiah described....the one born...the Son given....was on a mission from the Father to rescue orphans.

Christmas is about bringing orphans...you and me....into the Father's family where we belong. So Jesus came.....pleading with orphans to come home....to embrace the Father and His love for them. To allow Him to be their provider, protector and Lord.

God knew that everyone was seeking their Heavenly Father....they just didn't know it yet. He looks down from Heaven on those who don't know Him.....and he sees them like we see the children on the streets in Zambia.

Jesus saw the huddled and harassed masses as orphans. Separated from their Heavenly Father, innocent but being manipulated by the Wicked One, vulnerable, afraid, scared, He said that people were harassed and helpless like sheep without a Shepherd.

Jesus came that Christmas Morning to be a Father to orphans. Everyone needs their Heavenly Father....that is why Isaiah told us that we would call the Messiah Father. But not just any father.....He added....

Everlasting

God knew that we would have another great fear.....a fear that also resonates deep within our Soul.....the fear of being abandoned by our Father.

Many in our culture today suffer the Father Wound....not because they didn't have a father.....not because their father was horrible and abused them.....but rather they are hurt to the core because their Father abandoned them.....checked out....left their Mom....their family....and most importantly them.

For others....their father died. Left Mom and Family....loved them desperately but unfortunately not here with them....Their Father wound is still very real and they realize perhaps more than others what it means that the Father would be everlasting. Because their earthly father was not.

God wanted us to know....that this unique God man would not only be called Father but he would be called....Everlasting Father.

Once we are reunited with our heavenly Father.....We will never be separated. When we are reborn spiritually into the Father's family we will never have to worry about being orphaned again. Our status as His child is everlasting through all of eternity.

They will call Jesus.....Everlasting Father..... Someone who became a father and will always be a father. Someone who became our protector.....our provider.....our spiritual leader.....our teacher and one who instills loving discipline.

This term also implies that once He truly becomes a Father.....He is an everlasting one. The relationship cannot change. He will always be our Father. He will never leave us or forsake us. In our throw away world....we don't experience too many things that are everlasting.

Businesses and corporations don't last. Governments and kingdoms don't last. Even people don't last. No matter how much your parents love you, no matter how much your husband or wife cares for you, if you live long enough there will come a day when they will leave. They will abandon you. If not by choice, then by their death. Their lives will someday come to an end, and there's nothing they can do about it.

Things born of the flesh die.....Things born of the Spirit never die. In your flesh.....your Father is Satan....and He will destroy you and abandon you as an orphan. But once born in the Spirit? Your old Father Satan, is dead to you and you have a new life from a new father.

So two words that would describe this Messiah.....Everlasting Father.....Someone who becomes our Father. We have a relationship with Him.....we have eternal life. We know- we relate to and trust the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. And once we allow Him to become our Father, He protects, provides, teaches, leads us spiritually, and lovingly disciplines us, He becomes our Everlasting Father.

Hebrews 13:5-6 (ESV) — he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

And although we were all once orphans.....our Father will never leave us.....He shall be called Everlasting Father....Immanuel (God with us) and His last words to us? From the Mount of Olives....

Matthew 28:20 (ESV) — 20 And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

And at the end of Revelation

Revelation 22:13 (ESV) — 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

That's why Jesus' eternality matters. That's why we care that Jesus will never change, and never cease to exist. Because it means that all of the good things he is to us now, he will always be to us. He will always be our provider, and protector, and our savior.

He will always be our refuge, and our strength. His love for us will never cease, either in this world or the next. In him, we will have eternal joy, and hope, and glory, and pleasure.

In Christ, we will be eternally blessed and secure. Jesus will always keep his promises to us, even when other people can't or won't

No matter what we may be going through, whether suffering or disappointment; whether pain, or sorrow, or confusion; no matter how other people may treat us; whether we've seen our highest dreams realized, or our greatest hopes in this world dashed to pieces -- no matter what this life brings us, we can have peace and contentment.

Because we know that everything in this world is temporary. It will soon pass away. But our life in Christ is forever. He is eternal; he will never die, and neither will we. And his love for us -- his goodness, and compassion, and kindness -- will never end. We are his people and he is our savior, now and forever.

Hebrews 1:10-12 (ESV) — 10 And, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; 11 they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, 12 like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end."

That is why the Christmas Story is so important. This Child would be like none other....Wonderful Counselor.....Mighty God.....Prince of Peace... and now we understand.....He will be called Everlasting Father.

God desperately seeks to provide for and protect orphans. Throughout Scripture He directs and demands that we care for those who have been abandoned. That is why He had to send His Son to save us. Christmas is an Orphan Rescue Mission. Our Spiritual Father sending His Son as a gift to rescue orphaned sinners.

During this Christmas season, we tend to focus on the miracle of Christ's birth. The shepherds, the angels, the wise men. The first-time mother, giving birth in a stable. The beauty and innocence of that babe in the manger. And it's entirely appropriate for us to do so. But we also need to remember why it was that Christ came, why he had to come.

Because people born of the flesh need to be saved.....and orphans need an Everlasting Father. . Not just a good moral example. Not just a wise teacher. Not even a religious leader. We needed a Savior who will be called OUR Everlasting Father

My heart breaks for the Orphans of Zambia. I can't imagine how desperately they just want to have someone love them, protect them, teach them, and provide for them. And as I think about them.....as I watch them.....I begin to Understand Christmas.....and the way God sees us. Let's go back and look carefully at what Isaiah said.

Isaiah 9:2 (ESV) — 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;

We walk through darkness....and we have seen a great light.... But then....Isaiah tells us.....some don't just walk in darkness.....they live.... they dwell.....not in darkness but..... in deep darkness.

Isaiah 9:2 (ESV) — 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,

Sometimes we walk through darkness and we see a great light, but other times God requires that we dwell in darkness.....that we spend time there.....But God promises us through Isaiah that in those times when we are to dwell in darkness.....we will not just see a great light.....WE WILL FEEL IT!

Isaiah 9:2 (ESV) — 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

It is one thing to see the Light of Jesus....it is quite another thing to experience it. There is something about the deepest....darkest times in our lives.....when we don't just see God's light.....but it envelopes us....the warmth of His love holds us.....sustains us.....and allows us to move forward through pain, grief and loss.

It is in those deep dark moments when we fully understand that despite the horrors we have experienced....our future is safely in the protective arms of Everlasting Father.

Many will face this Christmas in Deep Darkness.....you are in a time when God is requiring that you stay there for a while..... But the reason a child was born and a son was Given.....is that no matter how deep the darkness.....all orphans can feel the light that is their EVERLASTING FATHER

I started this series by explaining that the Christmas Story is set in midst of dark times.

We all are either in dark times, coming out of them, or headed to them. I want to close by allowing all of us to spend some time in the presence of our Everlasting Father.

I would like us to spend a few minutes meditating.... Close your eyes for a second. Just relax. Nobody in the room is watching, so just take a minute to build a little hallway in your heart. Now in your mind's eye.....think about all the things that are troubling you as we begin this new year...

Go ahead take some time...Allow the Holy Spirit to remind you..... Now....I want you to take all that is dark for you in this moment.....and imagining holding all of it.....as Jesus crests the hill.....looks over your life.....and stops.

Listen to His Words as He prays for you.... How often I have longed to gather you my orphan as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.....

Now take a deep breath.....imagine Him right now, wrapping His fatherly arms around you. Feel the warmth of the embrace of an orphan releasing everything to the love, protection and provision of their Father.

Allow yourself to dwell not in darkness but in His great light. Feel the warmth of His love....Feel his arms wrap you as you let go of all your burdens.....Now let your shoulders heave a sigh of relief....Allow His tenderness to soothe all that is rough in your life right now....

Embrace every drop of the love that an orphan feels wrapped in the arms of their Father..... And know....that this embrace....this love...this provision....this .protection.....this feeling.....is EVERLASTING>

Jesus....thank you for being to us....a Father forever. May your tenderness overwhelm all of us each moment as we begin this new year. For unto us a child is born.....to us a son is given.....and He shall be called....Everlasting Father.....Amen.