

We Can Only Imagine

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Recently I was at a conference with a friend when he received a disturbing phone call from his wife. A day or so before, their young son had been playing in a vacant lot with his friends. Crawling on their hands and knees, the boys had created exciting tunnels through the dense underbrush. What they didn't know was that much of the underbrush was full of poison ivy. My friend's wife was calling, practically in tears, struggling to decide what to do since the little boy's face had swollen to the point he could hardly see.

My friend decided that it was time to skip the conference and return home to care for his son. "I could hear the little guy crying in the background," he told me later. "I just had to return and help him. I could not stay any longer for the conference. He needed me too much." (A trip to the doctor, a shot and some medicine eventually brought the poison ivy under control.)

There is no doubt that the little boy wanted his father to be with him. But the love of the father for his son was even greater. Someone has wisely said that the love of the parents is given to the children's children. In other words, parents can love their children greater than children can love their parents. It's the way God made us.

This Sunday is Father's Day. While it is a good day to honor dads, it is an even greater day to reflect on the power of a father's love. Some parents will not accept that their love for their children is naturally stronger than their children's love for them. As their children marry and establish homes of their own, some parents become jealous that they are no longer the center of their children's attention. They complain they are being neglected when their children make plans that are centered on their own immediate family.

We who have adult children need to remember that they will never love us as much as we love them. But they will love their own children just as much. And that is what really matters. Rearing children is a lot like shooting a bow and arrow. As long as the arrow is in the bow, the archer has control over where it will go. But once released it is on its own, liable to wind gusts, obstacles and gravity. As parents, God loans us children for a moment, to point them on their way. The arrow never flies back to the bow. In the same way, true parental love is not self-seeking, but instead rejoices as the children discover the dreams God has planned for them.

This Father's Day is not only a good time to remember our earthly fathers, it is also a good time to reflect on our Heavenly Father. God loves us more than we could ever love him. When bad things happen to us, God wants to take us in his arms more than we can imagine. Just as my friend loved his young son in his time of need, God has a special love for us in our times of trouble.

When a child is in danger, a loving father will do anything to see him safely home. The child may cry out in fright, but what he doesn't realize is that his father would give his very life for his safety. In the same way, when God's children are confused and afraid, God has not turned his back on them. He loves us more than we can imagine. Jesus loves us so much that he did give his life for us, dying on a cross nearly two thousand years ago.

The next time you face a difficult or confusing situation, remember that your deepest spiritual moments can occur in the midst of your greatest challenges or problems. Your Heavenly Father loves you beyond measure, even when you feel alone and unlovable.