

On Friday, my son turned 6. So we did the big birthday party and went bowling. He got to pick 12 of his buddies and we went bowling, ate pizza and just had a good time. Almost everyone got my son Legos, including us. Now he loves them, but his mom and I hate them. They're tiny, they get everywhere, you step on them and hurt and they get stuck in the vacuum. So we got home from the bowling alley and I'm already a bit needing to breathe deeply. I like to control things, and if you've got 12 five-year-old boys, you're not controlling anything. So I had been managing chaos for a couple of hours before we got home.

So we get home and Reid is tearing into his presents, opening up all his Legos. Immediately Star Wars are getting mixed up with dinosaurs, and then there's frustration that we can't put it together. I don't put stuff together. I can see the vision, but I need others to come alongside that vision and put it together. I hardly help my son at all in this case. Finally it's just evident that everyone needs to go to bed, especially daddy.

So we take our three up, do the Bible study and pray a little prayer of blessing. I come back downstairs and get in bed. And then the Spirit begins to convict me that earlier in the day I had talked with my oldest daughter in a way that was a poor reflection of Christ's love for her and God's patience with her. The Spirit never does that in the morning when I wake up.

So there I am comfortable, under the blankets next to my extremely attractive wife, and I have to get out from those comforts and walk up the stairs, cuddled next to Audrey and said, "Boo, are you up? Hey, remember earlier today when daddy said this and did this? That was really uncalled for. That wasn't about you. That was about me. I sinned against God and sinned against you. I need you to forgive me. Will you forgive me?" And she's always very gracious and said, "Yeah dad, I'll forgive you."

So after that I'm coming down the steps, I get to the landing and I see out of the corner of my eye a shadow on the floor of what appears to be someone running towards me. Now I consider myself a manly man. There are sometimes where I want something to happen. Like I want someone to come at me. There are sometimes in these weird scenarios where I hope that dude says something, where I want it to go bad. Like I've been out with the kids going for a walk when I see somebody walking their dog. I want that dog to attack us, and I'll rip it to pieces. I've been out camping where I want a bear to come at us. I'll gouge its eyes out. I want that to happen. And what I learned Friday night is that all of that is a false bravado. Because I saw a shadow of what appeared to be someone coming at me and I literally hunkered down. I tried to scream, but my adrenaline had flooded so much into me that I could only let out a whimper. And then when I realized no one was coming at me, I looked up and there was a gift bag that had four balloons attached to it that the air-conditioner was blowing. You see, we have a piano in the corner that has some electric stuff hooked up to it. That red light was pushing through and pitching a shadow on the floor that looked exactly like a man coming at me. But once I turned and looked at it, it was kind of funny if it weren't so shameful. So in shame, I went and climbed back in bed. Lauren said, "Did you say something?" "No, I didn't say anything."

And it really struck me that this looked so different from that. What the shadow looked like and what was actually there weren't the same thing. Now what we know from the Bible about God is that no one has actually ever seen God. We have

seen the hem of His garment, but nobody has actually seen Him. So what God gives us to communicate what He's like is shadows of His form. So the shadows are how God communicates who He is and how He operates with us.

So I want to go through a couple of those with you, so we can figure out who God is and what God looks like. In the book of Hebrews, the Bible says that God is a consuming fire. This basically means that God changes us. He changes the way we look and the way we think. There is nothing more powerful than Him, nothing more aggressive than Him and nothing more able to shape and bend to His will than God.

If it's under 72°F, my wife wants a fire. So we have burned through a small forest in our nine years here. It's so often that we're burning fires in our house that, in the last five years, we have burned through two of those iron grates that hold the wood. We have literally burned so much that it bent and broke two pieces of iron. So fire not only consumes, but it shapes, changes and moves. And God says, "That's like Me. I'm a consuming fire."

Now the second one I want to talk to you about is in Psalm 144:2. It says, "He is my steadfast love and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield and he in whom I take refuge." So not only is God a consuming fire, but He is a refuge, a shield, a fortress and a castle. So not only does God change whatever He touches, but if we run to Him and run into Him, He is our protector, He is our defender and He is our provider. And this is one of the things we see about God in the Bible. "I am your fortress. I am your shield. I am your protector."

And then the last and most common picture that God is most painted with and the way that God has chosen to communicate Himself to us most consistently is with the term "Father." So God is a consuming fire, God is a fortress, shield and provider, but He is most often in the Bible simply called Father.

Now that's a tough one, and let me tell you why. It's tough because all of us, regardless of who you are, had imperfect men as fathers. So we'll look at the shadow and we'll think that that shadow is the form. When that happens, we begin to believe that God is like our earthly father. So if our earthly father didn't have enough time for us, didn't want to bother with us, abandoned us or didn't care about us, then if we're not careful, we'll believe that God is like our earthly fathers. All earthly fathers are broken.

I constantly run into men and women who won't run into God for help, won't run to God for love and won't run to God for mercy because their daddy just wanted them to do what he wanted them to do and leave him alone. So since that's the shadow they saw, they have decided, "Let me just do what I'm supposed to do and leave Him alone." Because they don't understand that the Father delights in His children, loves His children and never grows weary of His children. Our earthly fathers are just a shadow. The picture, the form is our heavenly Father.

Now here's the best news that I'm going to be able to give anyone ever. This consuming fire, this fortress, this shield, this protector, this provider, this infinite all-powerful God Father in heaven longs to adopt us as sons and daughters, to correct and make right the shortcomings of our fathers and to fill in where they have failed.

So let me show you how this works. Turn to Galatians 4, starting in verse 3. "In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world." Let me try to explain this as easily as I can. You and I have one thing in common – we are sinners. Have any of you ever lied? That's unanimous. Have you ever taken something that's not yours? This is universal. So if we have all told lies, then we are all liars. We want to make it cute and go, "No, I'm not a liar. I just lie sometimes." And if we've all taken what's not ours, we're thieves. Now we want to make it pretty. "No, I'm not a thief. I just occasionally take stuff that's not mine." No, you're a thief. I could go on and on with any

of the Ten Commandments. I don't even need to get into the 600 breakdowns of the Ten Commandments. All of us fall short of the glory of God. Everyone in this room is a sinner, and that sin blocks our adoption from the perfect Father.

Now watch what happens next. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." So you're a sinner, I'm a sinner, you're a thief, I'm a thief, you're a liar, I'm a liar, you worship other things besides God and I worship other things besides God. All of this is true, so we're under the Law and condemned. So Christ comes and He obeys all the rules. He literally breaks no rules. He obeys all of them and says to us that if we'll believe in Him, He will give us His goodness and take from us our badness or our rebellion.

Now Jesus did not come to bring your rules to be followed. Because you already know the rules and you can't keep them. How many of you know it's wrong to lie? But you still lied, right? So the problem wasn't that you didn't know the law. The problem was that you knew the law and broke it. Now how many of you know you're not supposed to steal? Well you knew it, but you did it anyway. So the problem is not the action. The problem is your heart. So what you need is a new heart, not to do better at following the rules. It has been my experience that most people with a church background struggle with this idea. It's the difference between grace, an acknowledgment of what grace is and a belief that you can control your own salvation with your behavior.

Now look at what happens, because we need a new heart and God is going to do just that. "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So when Jesus comes, lives that perfect life and they nail Him to the cross, Jesus is taking onto Himself every lie, every bit of thievery, every bit of anger and every bit of rebellion. Every bad thing you would ever do is absorbed by Jesus Christ on that cross like a sponge absorbs water until you are completely clean of all your badness. And then Christ replaces it with all His obedience to the rules. So you get the best of Jesus and He takes from you the worst of your. The Bible says in that moment that the Holy Spirit comes inside of us and we cry out "Abba! Father!"

So my eight-year-old is hitting that age where I'm not the coolest man alive anymore. I had that for a few short years, but I'm already coming in second to some neighborhood girls now. It wasn't like that always. I used to come home and she'd run up to me going, "Daddy!" So I'm mourning that a bit. I hear it gets worse. But it is my biblical understanding that my job is to train her to not need me. I've got to train her to leave my house and marry some dude who had better be legit. I've already told you that I want something to go wrong, so don't be that guy. Ultimately, when I come home and my two youngest go, "Daddy!" and run to me, what they're revealing is that they have an affection for me, that they trust me, that they enjoy me and that they know I am for their good.

So what he's describing in this text in Galatians is that, after our sin is taken from us and we're given this sonship, the heart change is we cry out, "Abba! Daddy! Father!" Which means we know He's for us, He loves us and He has made a way for us. So we pursue Him rather than run from Him. And that takes care of the bad stuff. The bad stuff doesn't get removed from your life because you try not to be bad. The bad stuff gets removed from your life when you find something that is more beautiful, lovely and desirable than the bad stuff.

So when we come in here and sing, raise our hands, pray and open up the Bible, we're celebrating the fact that we're sons and daughters of the consuming fire, of the rock, of the fortress, of the shield, of the castle. We are celebrating the fact that you and I are princes and princesses of God on high, that our Brother is the Son of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ, that we are co-heirs with Him and that we will reign and rule with God forever. That is the kingdom we're invited into. So for any and all who will lower themselves and say, "Jesus, help me. God, save me. I have sinned. I do what's

wrong. I do what's bad and don't even know why. God, help me," the Bible says that He hears, responds and gives the Spirit of adoption that transforms our hearts so that we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

One of the reasons I love Compassion International and our Foster and Adoption Ministry (FAM) is there are few things on earth that really show what God has done for us in Christ than by fostering, adopting and sponsoring a kid. To give freely out of your abundance to someone who doesn't stand much of a shot outside of your intervention is one of the most beautiful pictures of God's saving grace that we have this side of heaven.

So my hope for all of us today is that, by making the gospel message as simple as possible, you'll hear. Spirit, give us ears to hear that God is in the adoption business and has fixed what was barricading our adoption as sons and daughters. Another hope is that you'd be gracious to your dad. He's just a shadow. I had to go apologize to an eight-year-old. I had to climb the stairs, get next to her bed and after 20 years of following Christ and after years of being her daddy, I had to go, "I was an idiot again. Please forgive me. Daddy needs Jesus just like you need Jesus. Daddy sins against God just like you sin against God. Daddy has sinned against you just like you have sinned against others. But here's the good news. The good news is that, for all of us, forgiveness is available. For all of us who would lower ourselves and ask for mercy, God will extend it." My hope and prayer is that you'll lower yourself and cry out for mercy.

Let's pray. "Holy Spirit, thank You for these young men and women, these old men and women. I ask that You would pour out in rich abundance saving grace. From young and old alike, I pray You would call to Yourself those who will love You and surrender to You. We thank You for those of us who have been adopted, who have been given a Spirit that cries out, 'Abba! Father!' for those who know You are good and know You are gracious. We thank You and praise You. I pray for those who haven't quite understood the message or haven't quite come to grips with exactly what it is. Maybe the simplicity of today would stir up their hearts toward You. We thank You for the energy and liveliness of these children and ask blessings on their lives. It's for Your beautiful name we pray. Amen."