

LETTER TO DAD

A Devotional Meditation on Eikev (Because)

Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25; Isaiah 49:14-51:3; Matthew 4:1-10; Philippians 3:7-16

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During my first year in college, I wrote a letter to my Dad explaining how well I had adjusted to campus life. I concluded the letter by asking him to pray that things not get so good for me that I would forget God.

Now that I am a father and grandfather, I understand why that prayer request pleased my Dad. It told him that his prayers had been answered. At the young age of 18, I had learned the values he and Mom had taught us, and had adopted them as my own. From what I know of his upbringing, he did not have the advantage I did of a stable home life centered on the deep Christian faith of my parents and grandparents. Because of that, I surmise that he saw in my letter the assurance that I would not make the same mistakes he had.



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Neither Dad nor I knew how much I would need his prayers just a few months later. That's when the newness of college life had worn off and I began to pay attention to the influences that called into question everything I had learned at home. The fleshly temptations were all there: sex, drugs, alcohol, and no parental oversight. It was hard enough to navigate all of that, but in addition I encountered worldviews and thought systems that challenged my biblical values.

I can't say that I fended off every temptation, but I did come through that crisis of faith with my biblical worldview intact. The alternatives simply could not offer an answer to the dilemma I felt deeply in my being: that our connection with the Creator of the Universe was broken, and only He could fix it. He did that by inserting Himself into our human reality as Jesus of Nazareth, the one I now know by His Hebrew name, Yeshua. He was the same person I had invited into my life at the age of 9, and He was still with me at the age of 19.

That was nearly 50 years ago. At the time, I clung desperately to my God more out of faith than experience. Today I cling to Him with the experience of faith. Now I know a little better what God teaches us about life. He tells us it's hard, and He advises us to choose Him and His ways so we can navigate those hard things. It's not just the hard times, when there's not enough money, or sickness and death visit, or danger is all around. More often, it's the hard decisions, like choosing what is right, or at least choosing what is less wrong.

This is why Yeshua told us that we don't live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. As He did so often, Yeshua was quoting Moses. Here's what Moses said:

You are to remember all the way that *Adonai* your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness—in order to humble you, to test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His *mitzvot* [commandments] or not. He afflicted you and let you hunger, then He fed you *manna*—which neither you nor your fathers had known—in order to make you understand that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of *Adonai*. Neither did your clothing wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these 40 years. Now you know in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so *Adonai* your God disciplines you. . . Take care that you do not forget *Adonai* your God by not keeping His *mitzvot*, ordinances and statutes that I am commanding you today. Otherwise, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply, and silver and gold multiplies for you and all that is yours multiplies, then your heart will be haughty and you will forget *Adonai* your God. . . You may say in your heart, “My power and the might of my hand has made me this wealth.” Rather you are to remember *Adonai* your God, for it is He who gives you power to make wealth, in order to establish His covenant that He swore to your fathers—as it is this day.

Deuteronomy 8:2-18 TLV

My 19-year-old self didn’t know these exact words, but the concept of God putting us through disciplinary tests was known to me. My high school football coach was one person who taught me that. He tested us to see what we had in us, and whether that was the right stuff to make a winning team. My instructors in the Army taught me the same lesson, only then the stakes were higher because lives depended on it. Later still, when I got married, my wife and I reinforced the lesson for each other, and then learned even more when our children came along. That’s when the stakes were the highest, because it wasn’t simply their lives on the line, but their future and ours.

These are lessons a person doesn’t learn very well if all he or she wants is to have an easy life. That’s not why God created us. We’re made for much higher purposes that extend beyond this reality we know and into the reality of eternity. We sell ourselves short if all we want out of life is peace, happiness, and a good time.

That’s another thing I suppose 19-year-old me knew instinctively. At least I knew enough to put it in that letter to Dad. I did, and still do, hope to enjoy peace, happiness, and good times, but that’s not the focus of my life. The focus is the Creator Who made me. He is my Heavenly Father, and I’m trying to live for Him. In that sense, my whole life is a letter to Dad.