

2-2020

## Father Wounds in Black Christian Women: Their Effects on Identity and Perception of God as Father

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

FATHER WOUNDS IN BLACK CHRISTIAN WOMEN:  
THEIR EFFECTS ON IDENTITY AND PERCEPTION OF GOD AS FATHER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2020

Portland Seminary  
George Fox University  
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 17, 2020  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation

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To all Black women who struggled to navigate life, love, and God without the desired guidance of their fathers know that you are loved, wanted, and enough!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

—Philippians 4:13

I want to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for the courage and confidence to complete my dissertation. This process stretched my faith and solidified my trust and dependence on God. I would also like to express my most profound appreciation to my dissertation advisor, Dr. Carole Spencer. Your guidance and encouragement have significantly contributed to the completion of my dissertation.

I cannot begin to express my thanks to my mother, Angela Cleveland. Mom, you provided nurturing love and constant emotional support throughout this tedious journey. Thank you for encouraging me to “meet every challenge,” and for the countless hours, you listened to me read over portions of my dissertation. Words cannot describe the amount of love and appreciation that I have for you. I am incredibly grateful to my siblings, Aqualia Bostic and Dwayne Barnes, for your love, unwavering support, and profound belief in my work. There were times that I questioned myself and you all surrounded me with prayers and protection. Thank you! I want to extend my sincere thanks to Pastors Mark and Marla Strong for your prayers, invaluable insight into my topic, and advice for navigating through the dissertation process. I would like to recognize the assistance that I received from Tirzah Radford for providing constructive recommendations during the editing phase.

Special thanks to my friends De’Sha Wolf, Alisia Ford, Tiyanna Payne, Cherise Buchanan, Kimberly Hodge, Tiara Gay, Kyra Pappas, Felita Singleton, Michelle Lang,

Akeylah Giles, and Janice Nehren for extending an enormous amount of encouragement, laughter, and a shoulder to lean upon, that kept me centered during this project. I love you all, and I am so happy to have friends like you. We have shared countless hours discussing various aspects of my dissertation. Thank you for all of your insight and inspiration.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the father-daughter relationships of Black Christian women, specifically, the impact emotionally and physically absent fathers have on Black Christian women's identity and perception of God. The misfortunes of slavery, poverty, the drug epidemic, and mass incarceration fractured the African American community, dismantling the Black family, creating the absent Black father. The Fatherless Woman Syndrome identifies five distinct, yet overlapping symptoms that have psychological and social implications affecting fatherless Black women. The level of pain caused by father wounds may distort wounded daughters' perception of God as being unreliable, inaccessible or non-existent, distant or uninvolved, authoritative, or as a harsh or mean father. An in-depth analysis of the various fatherly attributes God displayed within the context of the Old and New Testaments provide an accurate perception of the image of God the father. A review of four father-daughter narratives explores the emotional impact of the father's presence on his daughter.

The methodology used in this study to collect research was personal interviews and online surveys. The participants of the study answered questions that explored the general expectations of a father, relationship between father and self-esteem, perception of God, relationship with God and self-esteem, and theological beliefs. The theological perspectives represented in the research are traditional Christian, Feminist, and Womanist. The method to assist Black Christian women in rewriting their identity narrative and reconciling an authentic perception of God distorted by father wounds is a four-part process of healing father wounds through discovering the root of the father wound, renouncing the former mindset, embracing God's fatherly love, and living with a

healed heart. The study resolved that reconciling father wounds can rewrite the distorted identity narrative and perception of God within Black Christian Women.

CHAPTER 1:  
INTRODUCTION

**Personal Narrative of a Father-Wounded Daughter**

The emotional and physical presence of my father tremendously decreased after my parents' divorce. From the time I was born, I identified as a "daddy's girl." I loved my father. I was his baby girl, a distinction that separated me from my older sister. To me, my dad was my hero. He always made sure I was safe, loved, and happy. Growing up, I thought I had a better relationship with my dad than with my mom. I assumed the emotional bond I shared with my father was unbreakable; until the day he moved out of our house after my parents divorced. At eight years old, I watched my dad silently pack his belongings and slowly walk toward his car. Everyone in my family was home, but no one said anything. We all observed our family unraveling right before our eyes. I did not want him to leave our home, my life, or our family.

Since he had to leave, as a daddy's girl, obviously I wanted to go with him. I patiently waited for him to finish moving his boxes so he could pack my things. I grew impatient and wondered why he did not pack any of my bags. My heart broke as I stood on the front porch, watching my dad say his final goodbyes and pull out of our driveway. I had many thoughts going through my mind: "*He left me. He really left me. Why would he leave me? Wow, I guess I am not good enough for him since he left me.*" From this point, I was never the same. My father wounded my heart. The void created in my heart allowed for rejection to take residence, causing me to search for someone or something to fill the emotional and physical void of my father.

After the divorce, my parents decided on joint custody. My siblings and I lived with my mom full-time and bi-weekly weekends with my father. My dad went from living in our home, being a present, active, and emotionally available father, to a passive and then absent father who was out of the home and emotionally unavailable. Although I was able to see my dad on the bi-weekly weekends, the time together was different. I found myself fighting for his time and attention because he was distracted by other things. After a while, my mom informed me that my dad's frequent cancellations were due to his unavailability. Again, I wondered if I did something to make him mad and not want to spend time with me anymore.

Weeks went by between the time my dad would either call or come to see me. When he did, those were the best days of my life. My dad's presence made me feel wanted and loved. The times he made promises, I would wait and remain hopeful that he would deliver on his word. Sadly, the majority of his promises would go undelivered. I would ask my mom why he did not keep his promises, and she would make up excuses for him. I struggled when there was no communication as well. During those times of disappointment, the more my heart broke, the feelings of rejection deepened. I wanted my old dad back; I wanted him to be consistent again. Once I got old enough to realize that was not going to happen, I learned how to accept my father's part-time love.

Over the years, I learned the art of wearing a mask. I found myself putting my softer side away and allowing my anger and toughness to become my protector. On the inside, I nursed a broken heart, but on the outside, I was strong. I vowed to protect myself from being hurt again; I kept people at a distance. No one knew that I was searching for validation, acceptance, and love. I put forth the effort to be the best in school, church, and

sports so that I was always receiving validation from someone. Perfection was the mask I used to hide my sadness and disappointment. I refused to be a weak individual. With these suppressed emotions, I found myself lashing out in anger toward people. I used my mouth as a weapon to hurt others when I felt attacked or threatened. I wanted people to feel the same way I did on the inside.

It was not until my freshman year of college that my relationship with my father began to take a turn for the better. He was ready to be consistent in my life, and I gladly accepted him back. I came home every other weekend to spend time with him. During that time, my dad's health began to decline, and a year and a half later, he died. We were finally in the right place in our relationship, and he left me again. I felt a variety of emotions, ranging from sadness to anger. All the progress we made was lost. The feeling of rejection that I met when my parents divorced quickly reemerged and I did not understand why every man I loved left me. It must be that I am genuinely not loveable. Love, to me, was consistency. I felt like I did not get that from my dad, as he was always in and out of my life. Rejection painted a negative picture of my dad's love in my head. The emptiness of rejection took over my life, leaving me aching for love and acceptance, which I went back to looking for in all of the wrong places.

I moved from one relationship to another, hoping they would fix my father-wounded heart. While in those relationships, I compromised my standards and gave all that I had with the expectation of love in return. I thought that a man was supposed to be the knight in shining armor, fixing all of my problems while simultaneously filling the voids in my heart. During the dark period in my life, I had an encounter that was almost the death of me. Through the course of the relationship, his "love" turned abusive, and I

became a broken and battered woman. I was ashamed and embarrassed that I remained in an unhealthy relationship, believing the lie that I did not deserve anything better.

I became a Christian right before my parents divorced at eight years old and went to church regularly. At sixteen years old, I rededicated my life to Christ to receive guidance and love while navigating the disappointments in my life. In that time, I also received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. I found peace in knowing that Jesus would guide, protect, and love me unconditionally. Interestingly enough, I struggled with embracing the father image of God. In church, I learned that God is the father of the Triune Godhead and the father of Jesus Christ. In scripture, God is a father to the fatherless; He will adopt you if your parents forsake you, or through the Spirit, He is called Abba, Father. However, my personal experience with my dad distorted my perception of God as a father. I believed that I had to work for God's love by doing the right things. I also believed that God could not love me because I felt I was unworthy of love.

### **Defining the Problem**

“The most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman.”<sup>1</sup> This quote is derived from a speech by Malcolm X in 1962, highlighting the plight of the Black woman in the United States and also providing a motivational aspect surrounding the focus of this dissertation. Black women are

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<sup>1</sup> “Malcolm X – Who Taught You to Hate Yourself?” Genius, accessed April 25, 2019, <https://genius.com/Malcolm-x-who-taught-you-to-hate-yourself-annotated>.

routinely overlooked; even in research surrounding father absence within the Black community, the primary focus has been on Black men. There is limited research surrounding father wounds and their effects on Black women. This dissertation will explore the correlation between the relationship African American daughters have with their fathers and their perception of God as father. The primary focus is on the physically or emotionally absent father due to the high prevalence in the Black family. For the sake of this dissertation, the terms *fatherless*, or *father-wounded* will include the physical or emotional absence of a father.

The epicenter of Black women feeling disrespected, unprotected, and neglected, starts within the Black family. With the non-presence of a father in the home, the dualistic responsibility of raising the children falls on the mother. Unable to solely manage the task of parenthood, most African American women lean heavily on God for direction and the church for assistance. Since the inception of the Black church, the primary focus has been on major social issues and the survival of the Black community. In the church, the topic of fatherlessness has emphasized the social impacts but not the spiritual influence on the discernment of God as Father. To fully understand the gravity of the physical or emotional father wounds, this thesis explores the psychological, emotional, and relational dynamics of father-daughter relationships. The social and psychological effects of absent fathers presented in the Fatherless Woman Syndrome, in addition to the influence father wounds have on the distortion of the father God-image is the focus of this research. This dissertation includes personal stories of women,<sup>2</sup> like my narrative, who have been impacted by father wounds.

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<sup>2</sup> I will use pseudonyms for all women whose stories I gathered from my field research.

## Father-Daughter Relationship

Black women experiencing fatherlessness or father wounds are sadly increasing. The leading cause of declining child well-being and the root of many of the world's worst social problems, such as crime, child poverty, and teen pregnancy, is the father's absence.<sup>3</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 19.7 million children, more than 1 in 4, live without a father in the home. Statistics show that children raised in a father-absent home have a four times greater risk of living in poverty. They are seven times more likely to become pregnant as a teen. They are more likely to have behavioral problems, abuse drugs and alcohol, and two times more likely to drop out of high school.<sup>4</sup>

From birth, children desire acceptance and the love of their parents. In the evolution of the relationship between parent and child, the bonds of trust and self-assurance are developed in adolescence and tested during the teenage years. Parents are responsible for developing the character, confidence, and personality of their child. Most of the time, mothers exhibit nurturing love. Nurturing love is expressed through her ability to encourage, motivate, understand, and care for her children. Fathers tend to exude affirming love. Affirming love is expressed through his ability to establish identity, self-esteem, and self-worth to his children.

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<sup>3</sup> Tiffany Wilson, "The Impact of Social and Psychological Factors on the Intimate Relationships of Fatherless African American Women" (EdD diss., Texas Southern University, 2017), 16, ProQuest Dissertations & Thesis Global.

<sup>4</sup> "The Proof Is In: Father Absence Harms Children," The Fatherhood Initiative, accessed August 5, 2019, <https://www.fatherhood.org/father-absence-statistic?hsCtaTracking=6013fa0e-dcde-4ce0-92da-afabf6c53493%7C7168b8ab-aeba-4e14-bb34-c9fc0740b46e>.

The physical and emotional presence of a father in the life of his daughter is imperative to her emotional development. According to researchers, “a positive father-daughter relationship can impact daughters through avoiding problems later in life, such as teen pregnancy, marriage early in life, as well as abusive relationships.”<sup>5</sup> The time that a daughter spends with her father during the formative years, whether healthy or unhealthy, will be reflected within future relationships. Studies also show that “daughters fight for their fathers’ attention, bask in their praise, rebel against their authority, hide from their waves of anger, cry over their rejections, and pleasure in their smiles, as well as excitement to their manliness.”<sup>6</sup> Without the physical or emotional presence of a father, a significant wound to a daughter’s heart is created. The wound produces a disregard for her nurturing mother’s love and a search of the world for male approval. H. Norman Wright states,

No matter how nurturing a mother we may have, there is still a significant need for a father in all of us. This is especially important when it comes to meeting the four basic emotional needs all humans must have, as defined by Jack Frost in his book *Experiencing Father’s Embrace*: the need for unconditional expressed love, the need to feel secure and comforted, the need for praise and affirmation, and the need for a purpose in life.<sup>7</sup>

A father’s presence has a significant impact on the psychological framework of his daughter. He establishes the expectations for her future experiences with men, her ability to communicate and relate to others, along with a positive self-image. A present

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<sup>5</sup> Wilson, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> H. Norman Wright, *Always Daddy’s Girl: Understanding Your Father’s Impact On Who You Are* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), 16.

and involved father builds up his daughter's self-confidence by consistently encouraging and teaching her that she does not need a man to make her valuable.<sup>8</sup>

A father's emotional presence is just as significant to his daughter's emotional development as his physical presence. Studies show that Black daughters who live with their single mothers benefit from having a strong relationship with their father.<sup>9</sup> Fathers who are actively involved and emotionally supportive tend to raise daughters that are more likely to perform higher academically and succeed in navigating difficult situations.<sup>10</sup> The same is true for sons, but that is beyond the scope of this dissertation, which focuses on father-daughter relationships. Having a strained relationship between a father and daughter can be very harmful to her emotional state, leaving her with a wounded heart. Unlike the absent father who is not living in the home, the emotionally absent father is physically present, residing in her home but is not emotionally present in her life.

### **Emotionally Absent Father Types**

#### *Passive Fathers*

The emotional absence of a passive father can starve his daughter of the affection she needs, which can lead to her wanting to work for her father's time, attention, and affection. This father is often called a bystander: "The daughter, who tries in vain to get

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<sup>8</sup> Wilson, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Linda Nielsen, *Father-Daughter Relationships: Contemporary Research and Issues, 2nd ed.* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 168.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

involved with a bystanding father often ends up feeling misplaced. Sometimes she even feels responsible for his apathy.”<sup>11</sup> With this kind of interaction framing the mind of a woman, it can inspire them to want to seek attention from other men in some unfitting ways:

Daughters with a passive father will sometimes dress inappropriately in an effort to be noticed by men, or pursue sexual relationships at a young age to fulfill their desire to feel loved. Adolescent girls raised without involved fathers are significantly more likely to be sexually active than girls raised in two-parent homes with involved fathers. Children from the passive home become fiercely independent, and due to the lack of emotional response and love they receive as children, they often find it hard to form attachments later in life, experiencing loneliness even when surrounded by friends.<sup>12</sup>

The silence of a passive father inflicts the same emotional wounds as a physically absent father. Physically present fathers ought to be intentional about investing time, affection, and attention to his daughter; physical presence alone cannot sustain her emotional needs.

### *Abusive Fathers*

Child abuse is a tough topic to discuss since it is a multifaceted traumatic event that causes life-altering effects on the children involved. An abusive father uses power and control to induce fear, obedience, and loyalty into the child by using physical, verbal, sexual, or psychological tactics. Households in which participants suffer from alcoholism, substance abuse, or anger issues, demonstrate higher occurrences of child abuse as compared to households without.<sup>13</sup> Some of the deepest wounds children have

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<sup>11</sup> H. Norman Wright, *Always Daddy's Girl*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> John Bishop, *God Distorted: How Your Earthly Father Affects Your Perception of God and Why It Matters* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2013), 24.

<sup>13</sup> “Child Abuse,” *Psychology Today*, accessed July 1, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/child-abuse>.

come from abuse at the hands of their father. Abuse robs a child of the security and safety expected from a parent. When the most trusted person in their life becomes the perpetrator, it turns their lives upside down. An environment of unpredictability and instability becomes the constant norm, removing all sense of safety and security.<sup>14</sup>

An abusive father can also produce feelings of inadequacy within his daughter, causing her to want to repair the relationship so that it can return to being harmonious. The desire to repair relationships will be conveyed in a “fix it” mentality. A woman who possesses a fix-it mentality puts everyone’s needs before her own, while taking on the role of counselor to those around her. Since she has a difficult time trusting others, she gets into one-sided relationships with men. She utilizes her nurturing abilities to help men fix their problems but is unwilling to find a remedy for her own. Women who have experienced abuse, either by their father or their significant other, tend to have difficulties trusting, being vulnerable, and emotionally relating to God:<sup>15</sup>

If you were abused, you probably see Him as a harsh, mean God who will hurt you for no good reason. The thought of God as a father may be upsetting and incite fear in your heart if you believe Him to be easily angered and demanding. When considering God, the Father, you ask, “Am I safe? Can I trust Him? Will He protect me?”<sup>16</sup>

The physical and emotional wounds produced by an abusive father have disastrous effects on the emotional well-being of his daughter. A father is responsible for protecting his daughter and not inflicting pain on her.

### *Critical Fathers*

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<sup>14</sup> Bishop, 40.

<sup>15</sup> Kia Stephens, “How Fathers Affect Our View of God,” *The Father Swap* (blog), August 2, 2017, accessed April 26, 2018, [www.fatherswap.com/2015/07/how-fathers-affect-our-view-of-god/](http://www.fatherswap.com/2015/07/how-fathers-affect-our-view-of-god/).

<sup>16</sup> Bishop, 43.

The critical father is another emotionally unavailable father type that has significant impacts on his daughter. The critical father values obedience and creates unrealistic expectations and high standards of perfection for his daughter to meet in order to receive his approval or validation. Disappointment and disapproval are the leading emotions that are demonstrated by this father type. The critiques of a critical father wound the self-esteem and confidence of his daughter. The emotional deficiency creates a performance heart within his daughter, who believes she must work for her father's love. These actions leave his daughter wondering if she will ever be enough for her father. Women who have not received validation and love from their fathers often feel cheated. Smoldering with frustration, they may lash out in various ways to prove their value.

A woman with a critical father may have a distorted view of God. These women may perceive that God's love must be earned with good works. They tend to "imagine God to be unrealistically demanding, critical, and accepting only of your successes. They are afraid of disapproval, and believe that God's love is a prize to be earned through performance. He may seem out of reach and impossible to please."<sup>17</sup> Look how Kiana's critical father shaped her life and perception of God:

The relationship with my father was unpredictable, rocky, and turbulent. My father is mean, controlling, and emotionally absent. I grew up feeling unheard, and my opinion did not matter. For years, I have tried everything I could think of to win my father's affection, and nothing has worked. To him, I could never do anything right. He even told me that I would not do or be anything in life. That statement crushed my spirit. From that moment, I became motivated to prove him wrong. With every success in life, I am showing my father that I matter and I am worthy of love, more specifically, my father's love, kindness, and attention.

At the beginning of my relationship with Christ, I made sure I did everything right. I did not want to disappoint God because I thought he would

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<sup>17</sup> Bishop, 29.

scold me. I thought that I constantly disappointed God when I was not consistent with my spiritual growth. It took time to truly understand that I did not have to work for his love; it was freely given.<sup>18</sup>

The unrealistic expectations and emotional unavailability of critical fathers leave his daughters in a constant state of perfection, hoping to receive validation from her father from her performance in various areas. A father is responsible for encouraging and uplifting his daughter and not belittling her with harsh words or restricting emotional connection.

### *Inconsistent Fathers*

The inconsistent father is a man that is partially in the life of his daughter. This father type makes big promises to his children but fails to fulfill them. He is more focused on his personal life and not the responsibility of being a consistent father. The inconsistent father is not fully invested emotionally, financially, or physically into the lives of his children. He is aware of his responsibilities as a father but expects his children to keep their relationship flourishing. When the inconsistent father decides to come around his children, he is fully present, lavishing love, attention, and affection onto his children. However, once he is gone, he will make excuses as to why he is unavailable—leaving his children begging for his time and attention. The inconsistent father has very similar traits as the passive father being emotionally unavailable.

The daughter of an inconsistent father harbors emotions of rejection, abandonment, and low self-esteem. Like the daughter of a critical father, she believes she must work for her father's consistent love. These women also wonder if they will ever be enough to receive their father's consistent love. They tend to lean into perfectionism,

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<sup>18</sup> Surveyed on 3/19/18.

believing that if they are perfect, their father will come back into their lives. Women who are emotionally wounded by their father seek sexual intimacy to fill the emotional emptiness. Some women “learn not to expect love, warmth, closeness or intimacy from a man because these qualities were never evident in their fathers”<sup>19</sup> consistently. These women may also wrestle with their perception of God. Women with inconsistent fathers may see God as being unreliable, and his love comes with a catch.

An absent father wounds his daughter by creating a hole in her heart. The pain of the emotional or physical absence of a father is debilitating. This type of father wound can create a sense of abandonment. H. Norman Wright furthers this sentiment: “A daughter who was abandoned by her father carries many feelings into adulthood. She may doubt her self-worth, suspicious that she failed her role in keeping the family together.”<sup>20</sup> With this internal struggle commencing, she will hide behind a mask of perfection, which leads to being inauthentic. Jonetta Barras explains how the internal struggle of abandonment affects Black women in her book, *Whatever Happened to Daddy’s Little Girl? The Impact of Fatherlessness on Black Women*. She states: “A girl abandoned by the first man in her life forever entertains powerful feelings of being unworthy or incapable of receiving any man’s love. Even when she receives love from another, she is constantly and intensely fearful of losing it.”<sup>21</sup> Fatherless daughters grow into fatherless women who strive to cover their wounds from the world with masks of perfection, over achievement, heightened sexual desire, or anger.

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<sup>19</sup> Wright, *Always Daddy’s Girl*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, *Always Daddy’s Girl*, 89.

<sup>21</sup> Jonetta R. Barras, *Whatever Happened to Daddy’s Little Girl? The Impact of Fatherlessness on Black Women* (New York: Random House, 2000), 1.

In the field of psychology, John Bowlby initially formulated the attachment theory that “offers a biosocial, lifespan account of how close relationships form, are maintained, and dissolve and how relationships influence, sometimes permanently the persons involved in them.”<sup>22</sup> Initially, Bowlby found the relationship between child and parent influences the subsequent development of the child. As the early childhood attachment theory has evolved over the years, the scope of the theory now addresses issues that are emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physiological within adults as well. Kim Bartholomew developed four categories of attachment used within adult attachment theory: secure, preoccupied (anxious-ambivalent), fearful-avoidant, and dismissing-avoidant. Anxiety or ambivalence for these attachment categories “refers to the strong need for care and attention from attachment figures coupled with a deep, pervasive uncertainty about the capacity or willingness of attachment figures to respond to such needs.”<sup>23</sup> The avoidance corresponds to individuals’ limits of intimacy and interdependence with others.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, fatherless women are unable to hide their father wounds; they share five common symptoms known as The Fatherless Woman Syndrome.

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<sup>22</sup> William Steven Rholes and Jeffery A. Simpson, eds., *Adult Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Implications* (New York: Guilford Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Rholes and Simpson, 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

## Fatherless Woman Syndrome

Jonetta R. Barras developed the Fatherless Woman Syndrome from her past experiences and healing of her father-wounded heart.<sup>25</sup> This syndrome has five overlapping, yet distinct symptoms that have both social and psychological implications on the lives of Black women affected by fatherlessness. The symptoms are the “Un” Factor, Triple Fears Factor, Sexual Healing Factor, the “Over” Factor, and RAD (Rage, Anger, and Depression). The Fatherless Woman Syndrome is the result of Black women being unprotected, disrespected, and neglected.

The first symptom is the “*Un*” *Factor*. This category has psychological implications; it affects a woman’s perception of herself: “Frequently, the fatherless daughter believes herself as unworthy and unlovable. She has decided that she is the reason her father left.”<sup>26</sup> Women who did not receive their father’s approval as a child are more likely to question their self-confidence. Researchers report that a girl’s perception of how her father feels about her has more impact on her self-esteem than anything her father does or says.<sup>27</sup>

A woman exhibiting the “Un” factor has low self-esteem and self-worth. She believes that “no one would want *her*; no one could love *her*.”<sup>28</sup> With such a low perspective, she is sure that she is undeserving of happiness, love, peace, respect, or

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<sup>25</sup> Barras, 67.

<sup>26</sup> Rholes and Simpson, 199.

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, 31.

<sup>28</sup> Barras, 67.

dignity. This woman demonstrates a preoccupied or anxious ambivalent attachment.<sup>29</sup> She convinces herself that her fate rests in the hands of others, leaving them with the responsibility of directing and placing a value on her life. This woman loves hard, even attaching her value to the affection she bestows on people, with the hopes that the other person will identify her worth and treat her better. The belief surrounding love that corresponds to this mindset is that love “needs to be earned, so they had better perform. Thus, if they are missing something, they try to find it. In this case, it is Dad’s love. If he is not around, they try to find it in every man they meet.”<sup>30</sup>

As fatherless women, Sharlene and Judy identified the most with the “Un” Factor. In a separate interview, they shared the negative impacts on their self-esteem and self-worth by their fathers’ physical or emotional absence in their lives. Sharlene says:

Growing up, my father was in my life until he went to prison when I was fourteen years old. Although he is still serving time in prison, he has made an effort to be involved in my life even while he is away. He tends to demand a lot of me or have high expectations—which makes me feel like I am always falling short. I could never do anything right. His harsh words and no emotional support sorely impacted my self-esteem and self-worth. I look to others for validation and was desperate to make everyone happy. I found myself in a lot of unhealthy relationships with men. I compromised myself and many of my values in order to earn acceptance, love, and assurance I wanted from my father. Even though I am a Christian, I was mad at God because he allowed my dad to go to prison. It was tough to trust God and know how to rely on him as a father. It was also really hard accepting his love. I did not feel deserving or worthy of it. If I can be honest,

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<sup>29</sup> “Preoccupied individuals are high in anxiety but low in avoidance. They have an exaggerated desire for closeness but lack confidence in others availability and likely responsive to their needs. They depend greatly on approval of others for a sense of personal well being but have heightened concerns about being rejected or abandoned.” Nancy L. Collins, AnaMarie C. Guichard, Maire B. Ford, Brooke C. Feeney, “Working Models of Attachment: New Developments and Emerging Themes,” in Rholes and Simpson, 199.

<sup>30</sup> H. Norman Wright, *Healing for the Father Wound: A Trusted Christian Counselor Offers Time-Tested Advice* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishing, 2008), 70, Kindle. H. Norman Wright refers to the Fatherless Woman Syndrome as The Fatherless Daughter Syndrome in his book.

I did not trust that God wanted me. I came with the mindset of suspicion, of wondering what ‘The Catch’ was or what he wanted from me.<sup>31</sup>

Judy shared her passive father story during our one-on-one interview:

Growing up, I can remember my father being physically present in our home but not emotionally present. My father did what he thought was necessary, which was to provide financially for our home. We were not personally close. Although, I always longed to have a close relationship with my father that allowed me to be labeled as a “daddy’s girl.” Because of my father’s emotional distance, I suffered from low self-esteem. For years, negative self-talk dominated my thoughts. I believed I was ugly and I created a perfect persona for myself. When I was not able to be perfect, I would beat myself up for making mistakes. I cannot recall ever hearing an affirmation or receiving affection from my father. The only time my father’s voice was heard, or we interacted with him was when my siblings and I were disciplined. Secretly, I craved attention and the approval of men. Over the years, I used my performance at work to fill the void created by my father. I received the approval and affirmation that I desired from the men at work; the more they appreciated my determination and work ethic, the more my self-esteem increased.<sup>32</sup>

Sharlene and Judy’s stories both demonstrate the “Un” Factor as the foundation of their identity narrative, both seeking their father’s emotional security and validation from temporal relationships. Due to the neglect, fatherless women are introduced to a cycle of disappointment, reinforcing their feelings of rejection.

The second symptom of the Fatherless Woman Syndrome is the *Triple Fears Factor*, also known as abandonment syndrome. Fear motives the actions of a woman exhibiting the triple fears factor symptom. Commitment, rejection, and abandonment are the aspects of a relationship she fears the most. In order to circumvent her apprehensions from coming true, she begins to over-analyze her partner and relationship. This woman frequently selects the same kind of man who is unable to commit to relationships, treats

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<sup>31</sup> Surveyed on 3/21/2018. See Appendix C, “Discovering the Father Wound Survey.”

<sup>32</sup> Interviewed on 4/25/18.

her poorly, or is emotionally unavailable.<sup>33</sup> Fatherless women who are afraid of being abandoned tend to “pour hard work and effort into their relationship.”<sup>34</sup> Their effort is in such a suffocating manner that she may become controlling, display trust issues, be overly critical, needy, and stay in a relationship longer than necessary. Studies show that

Girls from father-absent homes may characteristically display an “anxious” and not an “avoidant” attachment style. An anxious attachment style implies a lower inclination to leave a relationship regardless of its relative time. Girls from father-absent homes might be expected to have longer average relationships than other girls, regardless of what strategy they adopt.<sup>35</sup>

When the relationship finally dissolves, the fatherless woman is secretly relieved, and her thoughts of being unloved are reassured. Latoya Jackson, a fatherless daughter, shares two related stories in her Master’s Thesis that exhibit the triple fears factor symptom:

Picture it: Sacramento State University, 2001. It was my first week of college, and I feel great! There is so much diversity, and there are so many people who have similar physical characteristics as me. For the first time ever, I feel like I belong somewhere. I walk on campus and guys are hitting on me... I am actually getting hit on! I meet Caleb, and we immediately connect. Our friendship quickly turns into my first “real” relationship. I am in love, and he becomes “my first.” Seven months after meeting him, and three months after officially dating him, Caleb decides that things just are not working out any longer. I was shocked! After the breakup, I started off strong. “I don’t need him!” Next thing I knew; I was on the floor in his dorm room. “Please do not leave me! I can change! We can make this work.” I was literally on my knees crying, begging him not to leave me. The picture is extremely vivid in my head, and I believe it was one of the weakest moments in my life. Nonetheless, just days after the break up, Caleb had a new girl. I came into Sacramento State feeling confident about myself, but my experience with Caleb threw my confidence right out the door.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Nielsen, 67.

<sup>34</sup> “Fear of Abandonment Issues and Therapy Treatment,” Good Therapy, accessed October 1, 2019, <https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/abandonment>.

<sup>35</sup> Michelle Cristiani, “Adolescent Females’ Strategic Behavior within Romantic Relationships,” *Politics and the Life Sciences* 22, no.1 (March 2003): 38, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4236684>.

<sup>36</sup> LaToya M. Jackson, “Where’s My Daddy? Effects of Fatherlessness on Women’s Relational Communication” (master’s thesis, San Jose State University, 2010), 21, [http://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd\\_theses/3767](http://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/3767).

Latoya identifies herself as a fatherless daughter and her greatest fear in relationships is abandonment:

Perhaps the word *relationship* does not adequately describe what I had with this next man because he and I were never officially together. He was my Mr. Big—the notorious bachelor and noncommittal antagonist on the series *Sex and the City*. He consumed four years of my life and all of my time, energy, will-power, and brain-power. “I’m not ready for a relationship,” he would say. “How can I make you happy if I can’t even make myself happy?” Mr. Big had a point. Regardless, as much as he told me that he was not ready to commit, I still stuck around hoping he’d have a change of heart. And very similar to my situation with Caleb, I found myself begging again. However, this time I was not begging for a man not to leave me, but begging for him to love me and commit to me. “Why won’t you just be with me?” My previous relationships gave me the strength to leave this non-committal person. I was strong enough to leave and never physically go back to him. Although I must admit that mentally I always did look back and wonder a lot of “what-ifs.” He truly was my Mr. Big!<sup>37</sup>

LaToya’s story replayed the crippling effects of abandonment and rejection introduced by her father and continued in her romantic relationships. Without the positive affirmation from her father, women like Latoya embrace a distorted self-image of being unloved and settling for men that mirror the same emotional unavailability as their father.

The third symptom is the Sexual Healing Factor. This factor is primarily expressed through intimate relationships. Sexual expression can be a primary indicator of fatherlessness in a girl or woman.<sup>38</sup> Women who were given very little attention or consideration from their fathers are more likely to fill the void created through seeking male attention and sexual intimacy.<sup>39</sup> When it comes to relationships, this woman has to

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>38</sup> Barras, 69.

<sup>39</sup> Karen Hill-Holiday, “Father-Daughter Attachment and Sexual Behavior in African American Daughters” (PhD diss., Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, 2009), 44–45, <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/1908>.

be in control of the way she engages intimacy. She may confuse love for lust in hopes that it will fill the empty hole in her heart and experience physical closeness. If a man is not able to fill her voided heart, she insists that having a baby will provide her the love she desires.

Janet's story is an interview shared with Averil Y. Clarke, in her book,

*Inequalities of Love:*

During college, Janet struggled to have what she viewed as a normal sex life. She got involved in a dating pattern that initially allowed her to access sex but not romantic relationships, as well as a “bad reputation” in the campus’s relatively small black community. About her search for love while trying to live down this reputation she had developed by getting sex but not romantic relationships from guys who seemed accessible to love but weren’t really, Janet would remark, “I needed to like somebody, and I needed somebody who liked me.” And it was in this moment of needing that which she could not find on a myriad of isolated dates with the campus’s far-too-approachable black football players that Janet happened upon Kevin, a man who was offering romance without sex.

Janet’s description of her relationship with Kevin began with a very long period of getting to know each other through work at the same local movie theatre and an even longer period of dating without sex. The latter more extended period started when Janet—after several weeks of working up her courage—said, “I like you. I want you to be my boyfriend,” and Kevin responded by being “really flattered” and the couple commenced “going out”. The sexual desire embedded in Janet’s need “to like somebody” and need for “somebody to like [her]” became obvious to me with her actions to bring this long latter period of dating without sex to a close. She told me, “So this went on for like two months, and I wanted to have sex, “cause I really like it... I was ready.” Then she explained how she had broached the subject with Kevin, asking, “You know, are we gonna have sex? To which he responded, “Well, you know I just don’t have sex with anybody.” But Janet continued, asserting that she didn’t “either,” and proceeding “to ask him all the questions that they ask you when you give blood” and explaining to him that she didn’t “wanna get pregnant” and didn’t “want to catch any disease,” until he finally said, “Oh yeah, well since we’ve talked about it, now I think we can do it.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Averil Y. Clarke, *Inequalities of Love* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 178.

Janet's story projects her wounded heart for her father's presence through physical intimacy with various men. Fatherless women who display symptoms of the Sexual Healing Factor will have difficulty displaying affection without physical intimacy.

The fourth symptom is the "Over" Factor. The "Over" factor is expressed when a woman uses perfectionism to cover her wound. She is determined not to allow anyone, man or woman, to discover her wound.<sup>41</sup> Perfectionism deprives her of identity, replacing it with a blanket of shame that prevents this fatherless woman from revealing her true self to others. This misconception deceives her into believing that no one will like, want, or love who they are, so instead she creates a false exterior. Women who feel rejected by their fathers have a hard time maintaining relationships platonic or romantic, considering one of the most significant parts of a relationship is transparency. Instead of focusing on herself, this woman will begin "acting like a superwoman who can handle everything without anyone's help."<sup>42</sup> She is a woman known as an overachiever. The motivation behind her success is to silently prove to her father that she was able to make it without him. However, if that does not work, she overindulges in substances to cope with the pain of failing. From the perspective of the attachment theory, this woman possesses a dismissing avoidant attachment.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Barras, 69.

<sup>42</sup> Nielsen, 67.

<sup>43</sup> "Dismissing avoidant individuals are low in anxiety but high in avoidance. They perceive attachment figures as generally unreliable and unresponsive but view themselves as confident and invulnerable to negative feelings. They attempt to maintain a positive self-image in the face of potential rejection by minimizing attachment needs, distancing themselves from others, and restricting expressions of emotionality," in Collins, et al., 199.

Jasmine shared her traumatic experience growing up with her overly critical father:

I grew up in a split parent household; my mother had me very young, and my father left and begun a new family with another woman. After this, he became very strictly religious and made it very clear that, after having three other children, my mother and I were different from them because we were “unsaved.” He very much made me feel like an outcast in his house when I went over every weekend. He caught me kissing a boy at thirteen (which I admit was a mistake, but also acknowledge it was only a kiss), and decided that I wasn’t allowed back. We didn’t talk again until I was nearly in college. By this time, I had married and divorced and had a young child. When we reconnected, he apologized, but never took accountability for the way he treated me. We get along, but I keep him at arm’s length; I still hold resentment for the way he treated me then. He is very vocal about how much I remind him of my mother, and how he despises how outspoken I am because he believes, under his conservative Evangelical faith, that I should not be. I do not think he realizes how much it bothers me that he says this. He does see his grandchildren every couple of months, but as far as I am concerned, this is probably as good as it gets.

I use to crave his love and acceptance, but now I settle for the distanced relationship we have. Although my dad never made me feel ugly or worthless, he made me feel like I did not belong to Christ; this left me feeling like I could never be accepted by God, not merely as I was because my dad created this understanding as he seemed like the ultimate authority on God when I was younger. If my dad could not accept me as the person I was, how could God? Initially, it made it hard to believe God loved me, and it became even harder to trust that He would continue to love me, especially despite me being more “radical” than the Christians in my dad’s church.<sup>44</sup>

Jasmine’s story exhibits the constant pressure and pain of trying to achieve the unrealistic standards placed on her life by her father. The rejection experienced by fatherless daughters distorts their insight of acceptance in both spiritual and natural relationships.

The fifth symptom is the RAD (Rage, Anger, Depression) Factor. The RAD factor can be a fount of unexplained anger and rage. This fearful-avoidant woman has “a strong sense of distrust in others coupled with heightened expectations of rejection,

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<sup>44</sup> Surveyed on 4/11/18.

which results in discomfort with intimacy and avoidance of close relationships.”<sup>45</sup>

Sometimes it is on the surface; other times it seethes out of sight, but within range to burst on the scenes at a moment’s notice.<sup>46</sup> Rage, anger, and depression are the leading emotions in the life of a fatherless daughter. Rage can be the motivating factor for the perfectionism or it can also develop into depression.

Dr. H. Norman Wright reviewed the RAD factor:

Each of these is a form of a message. Depression tells you something else is going on in your life that needs attention, and you need to listen to the message. Often depression is a symptom of grief, and most fatherless women have unresolved grief. Anger and rage are often results of hurt. Whenever you experience anger, look for pain. Where there is pain, something is usually broken and needs fixing.<sup>47</sup>

Fatherless women experiencing the RAD factor may not have the ability to decode the messages from the various emotions they are encountering in their lives. Sally shares her fatherless story in a one-on-one interview:

I grew up in a two-parent home until my mother died. It seemed like my father died as well because he became so emotionally detached from our family. I wondered if something was wrong with me because I couldn’t do or say anything to receive his love. To make matters worse, I was being sexually assaulted by a family friend, and I was afraid to tell my father about it; I didn’t think he would protect me because of his distance. I didn’t know how to manage my emotions so I leaned heavily into anger to express myself. I fought a lot. My heart was filled with bitterness; no love could be found. I was mad, I was mad at my father and God. I felt like no one cared or loved me. Honestly, I used my anger to over my sadness. When I lashed out at others, my goal was to make them feel the way that I did. I looked to relationships to give me the love that I wanted. I got pregnant and had a miscarriage. That loss challenged me to stop living my wild life. I decided that I wanted more for my life, so I went back to school. I ended up

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<sup>45</sup> Collins, et al., 199.

<sup>46</sup> Barras, 71.

<sup>47</sup> Wright, *Healing*, 72, Kindle.

receiving multiple degrees. Although I had degrees, I still felt empty on the inside.<sup>48</sup>

By identifying the symptoms and effects of the Fatherless Woman Syndrome it is possible to understand how the absent-father imprint transfers to every human relationship.<sup>49</sup> The fear of losing love persuades women to remain in unhealthy relationships with men, become an overbearing parent, or be so guarded that it is challenging to cultivate healthy friendships with others. Not only does the absent-father imprint transfer to human relationships but it also transfers to one's perception of God. In *Your Parents and You: How Our Parents Shape Our Self Concept, Our Perception of God, and Our Relationships with Others* the author explains how father absence impacts a woman's perception of God: "The woman who is a product of the absent-father syndrome will probably find it difficult to trust God. Her misconceptions about the father's role were made early, and she may experience a great deal of insecurity and aloneness as she is unable to trust even God the Father."<sup>50</sup>

### **Perception of God**

A woman's awareness of God can be molded by the experiences she encounters in life. Her heart is innately drawn to the identity, love, and protection found within the nature of God. If she is subjected to a variety of unhealthy experiences with a parent, the lens from which she perceives safety, affection, and identity will become wounded,

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<sup>48</sup> Interviewed on 3/28/18.

<sup>49</sup> Bishop, 18.

<sup>50</sup> Robert S. McGee, Pat Springle, and Jim Craddock, *Your Parents and You: How Our Parents Shape Our Self Concept, Our Perception of God, and Our Relationships with Others*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 13.

causing her perception of God to be distorted. If a parent—for the sake of this discussion, a father—was physically or emotionally absent, passive, critical, or abusive to his daughter, her perception of God will be impacted:

For better or for worse, parents represent God to their children. A child's emotional and spiritual formation is to be provided by them. Most important of all, parents are to model the love and strength of God to their children. They are responsible for portraying His reliability, His unconditional love, His acceptance, and His purposeful discipline. Though it obviously is impossible for parents to model the character of God perfectly, it is their responsibility to represent the Lord to their children.<sup>51</sup>

Over the years, the attachment theory has been utilized in both religious and psychological research to further develop parents' impact on a child's perception or relationship with God. Birky and Ball conducted a study of young adults, ages eighteen to twenty-one, which resulted in their concept of God being influenced more by their idealized parent than their non-idealized parent.<sup>52</sup> Kirkpatrick furthered this research by testing the theory of God as a substitute attachment figure. The results concluded that during times of distress, individuals with negative images of self (insecure images) are more interested in turning to God as a substitute attachment figure over time. Those with positive images of self and others (secure images) have a more secure attachment to God because of their internal awareness of healthy connections with others.<sup>53</sup> It has been reported that the need for attachment relationships are a lifelong need, and as children

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>52</sup> Jane R. Dickie, et al., "Parent-Child Relationships and Children's Images of God," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 1 (March 1997): 25–26, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1387880>.

<sup>53</sup> Rosemary Cook, "Father Absence and Correlates of Well-Being Among African American College Women" (PhD diss., Loyola University, 2003), 48.

mature, God becomes a perfect substitute attachment figure.<sup>54</sup> Fatherless African American daughters who possess symptoms of the Fatherless Woman Syndrome may also display any of the four attachment categories resulting in a distorted view of the Father-God image.

After encountering the level of pain brought on by the Fatherless Woman Syndrome, a woman experiencing the “Un” Factor will see God through the lens of her brokenness; that God is unreliable. Based on her experience from her father, she believes that God cannot be counted on. His promises of love and acceptance come with a catch that she must work to receive. The Triple Fears Factor breeds insecurity brought on by abandonment and rejection, which becomes a scar in her heart that challenges relationships inadvertently influencing her perception of God as either inaccessible or nonexistent. The fear will not allow her to believe she is wanted. A woman experiencing the Sexual Healing Factor will perceive God as being distant and uninvolved. With this perspective, women have learned from their earthly father to be independent and not to bother him, so consequently, they see God as disinterested.<sup>55</sup>

A woman exhibiting the “Over” Factor will perceive God to be authoritative. She believes that her needs or desires do not matter and God will only be concerned with her complete obedience. She will be afraid of his disapproval so she will lean into her perfectionism. Lastly, a woman presenting the RAD factor will perceive God to be harsh or mean. The thought of God as a father may be upsetting and incite fear in her heart if she believes Him to be easily angered and demanding.

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<sup>54</sup> Dickie, et al., 25.

<sup>55</sup> Bishop, 24–25.

This study is intended to examine how father wounds affect the personal identity and awareness of God as father to women within the Black church. This dissertation will assist Black Christian women in rewriting their identity narrative and reconciling an authentic perception of God that has been distorted by father wounds. The contemplated outcome of this research is to provide healing and freedom to Black women who have endured such hardships, adding to the research on father absence and Black women. The next chapter will discuss the historical and sociological factors that created and continue the epidemic of absent Black fathers in the Black community.

CHAPTER 2:  
HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS IN THE EPIDEMIC OF ABSENT  
BLACK FATHERS

The African American family has been under siege since the beginning of slavery until now. The dismantling of the Black family has caused continuous pain for the African American community but has bolstered economic advancement for the United States. This chapter will discuss four systemic processes of slavery, poverty, drug epidemic, and mass incarceration that created and reinforce the absent Black father in US-American society.

**The Devastating Legacy of Slavery**

The epidemic of absent fathers within the Black community is not a new concept to the United States of America. The issue of absent Black fathers was a systemic creation of slavery. In 1619, the first group of Africans was brought to Jamestown, Virginia, to serve as slaves,<sup>1</sup> in order to work long hard hours in the fields and the homes of the White Virginians, who increasingly shunned fieldwork.<sup>2</sup> Over the years, the colonial government established a plethora of laws that gave structure to racialized slavery, which would be enforced for 246 years. With these established slave laws, Black families were not deemed as legal families:

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Streissguth, ed., *Slavery* (San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 2001), 10. See also James O. Horton and Lois Horton, *Slavery and the Making of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29.

<sup>2</sup> James O. Horton and Lois Horton, *Slavery and the Making of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29.

Slave families were constructed outside of legal developments governing family relationships. Notwithstanding blood ties and romantic love, the slave family could not be an organic unit of permanently linked, interdependent persons. In the eyes of the law, each slave stood as an individual unit of property, and never as a submerged partner in a marriage or family.<sup>3</sup>

With this decision, slave owners were given the right to break up families anytime they wished.<sup>4</sup> Since slaves were not protected within the family laws that governed the United States, the dismantlement of the Black family commenced. To ensure enslaved Black families were different from the legalized White family, the status of a child was transferred from the father to the mother:

In 1662, Virginia changed the law to allow status to travel through the maternal line, so that children produced by unions between slave women and their free white masters would be slaves, not free. Thus, Englishmen could increase the supply of perpetual servants and more easily maintain the racial distinction between slave and free, enslaving their own children.<sup>5</sup>

The court system also declared Africans to be a different kind of human being<sup>6</sup> that could only be governed by a White slave master. Within the slave quarters, the men tried to exercise circumscribed authority<sup>7</sup> over their families but were emasculated from governing their homes, disciplining their children, and protecting their wives from the sexual and physical abuse. Dorothy Rogers states:

Indeed, Black men have never been considered suitable mentors for their children. Slave laws installed the White master as the head of an extended plantation family

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret Burnham, "An Impossible Marriage: Slave Law and Family Law," *Law and Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice* 187, no. 5 (1987): 189, <http://scholarship.law.umn.edu/lawineq/vol5/iss2/1>.

<sup>4</sup> Streissguth, 10. See also Horton and Horton, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Horton and Horton, 30.

<sup>6</sup> Burnham, 189.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

that included his slaves. The plantation family ruled by White slaveholders were considered the best institutions to transmit moral precepts to uncivilized Africans. Courts reasoned that the slave owners' moral authority over the family was ordained by divine imperative. Slaves, on the other hand, had no legal authority over their children. Naming a slave after his owner reinforced the child's ultimate subservience to his White master rather than to his parents.<sup>8</sup>

The hindrances created through slavery to dismantle the Black family continued to be reinforced by the constant separation and selling of the men and women to other plantations in the southern United States. Since enslaved Blacks were deemed property and the families created were not legal, the peril of separation amongst a slave family created an unspoken fear that the family would be sold separately instead of as a unit:

The abuse of slaves did not end at the occasional whipping or mutilation for disobedience, running away, or a bad attitude. The causal buying, selling, trading, and abandonment of slaves proved an equally cruel treatment. All of these broke up married couples and separated slaves from their children, who were treated as casually as any other property and disposed of without any thought to the sentiment of their parents. The sale of slaves often came as payments for debts or in the settlement of the estate of a deceased slave owner.<sup>9</sup>

Slave women endured extremely harsh treatments of being beaten, overworked, starved, insulted, and raped. The laws deemed enslaved African women as "sexual property not just as an instrument of reproduction, but along the full range of her sexuality. She was owned as both a procreative and a sexual object. Thus, she was available to be raped and sexually abused with impunity by the slaveholder"<sup>10</sup> or any White man. Because of the demoralizing treatment of women by planters, most enslaved men preferred to have broad marriages. John Hope Franklin, in the book *Black Families*, shares stories of

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<sup>8</sup> Dorothy Rogers, "Absent Black Father," in *Lost Fathers: The Politics of Fatherlessness in America*, ed. Cynthia R. Daniels (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998), 148.

<sup>9</sup> Streissguth, 116.

<sup>10</sup> Burnham, 199.

enslaved men preferring broad marriages instead of marrying women from their plantations for the sake of being exposed to their mistreatment at the hands of the slave masters:

As John Anderson puts it, “I did not want to marry a girl belonging to my own place, because I knew I could not bear to see her ill-treated.” Henry Bibb puts it even more eloquently: “If my wife must be exposed to the insults and licentious passions of wicked slave drivers and overseers; if she must bear the stripes of the lash laid on by an unmerciful tyrant; if this is to be done with impunity, which is frequently done by slaveholders and their abettors, Heaven forbid that I should be compelled to witness the sight.”<sup>11</sup>

Although the reasons given for not marrying women within their own plantation and having broad marriages was understandable, their non-presence still established a new reality for the Black family. Centuries later, there are African American fathers who are physically absent from the home, leaving the mother as the primary leader of the family.

After the post-slavery era, Black families encountered a plethora of issues, such as sharecropping, the Jim Crow era, unemployment, racism, and poverty, which continued to cause Black men to be absent from the homes: “Black men do not value family relationships any less than other men do, but many have been restrained by unemployment, imprisonment, and other deprivations from developing the family ties they desire.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John Hope Franklin, “African American Families: A Historical Note,” in *Black Families*, 3rd ed., ed. Harriette Pipes McAdoo (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997), 6. Also in John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Ante-bellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 86.

<sup>12</sup> Rogers, 150.

## Poverty

Poverty is another systemic issue that contributed to fatherlessness within the Black community. From slavery to the present, poverty has been an issue that is synonymous with the African American community. After the abolishment of slavery, a great migration of freed African Americans left southern states with nothing, in hopes of creating a better life in the North. The dream became a nightmare when Black women were the only ones permitted to work, leaving Black men unemployed.<sup>13</sup> With the lack of jobs in the North, most men returned to the South and began sharecropping, which cast the men back into slave-like labor. The men who were unable to find employment encountered vagrancy and convict laws that would lead to imprisonment for not being employed:

Nine Southern states adopted vagrancy laws—which essentially made it a criminal offense not to work and were applied selectively to blacks—and eight of those states enacted convict laws allowing for the hiring-out of county prisoners to plantation owners and private companies.<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, Black codes were overturned, and there was a small amount of advancement for African Americans in the southern states. During the Reconstruction Era, African Americans were able to receive federal assistance from the Freedmen's Bureau, an agency that supplied food, fuel, clothing, and other necessities to destitute former slaves.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the Freedmen's Bureau was overturned with the implementation

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<sup>13</sup> Michael E. Conner and Joseph L. White, eds., *Black Fathers: An Invisible Presence in America*, 2nd ed., (New York: Routledge, 2011), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, rev. ed. (New York: New Press, 2012), 28.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander, 29.

of Jim Crow laws in the southern states. Jim Crow laws were established to keep African Americans separated and inferior to European Americans.

In the 1940s, there was another migration of African Americans from the southern states to the more industrialized North in search of employment opportunities. This time, Black men were primarily leading the migration, creating uneven sex ratios either in the communities they left or were heading to.<sup>16</sup> With such a significant influx of people and racial segregation, Black families were restricted to a shortage of housing options, so “existing single-family houses were converted to tenements, resulting in exorbitant housing costs (and high profits for the absentee owners), overcrowding and public health problems.”<sup>17</sup> The overcrowding of the housing projects, low paying jobs, and health concerns, breed hopelessness, violence, and drug use within the community.

The Welfare system also encouraged fatherlessness in the Black community. In the 1960s, Black women who were eligible to receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) were not married and did not have a man living in their homes:

Many states granted aid only if a parent of the needy child was continually absent from the home, denying payments if the child’s father or “substitute father” lived there. This man-in-the house regulation penalized poor children of “non-absent” fathers, denying them welfare benefits. The results was to throw thousands of children off the roles (in Alabama, the number of AFDC recipients declined by 22 percent), and thousands of fathers cut out of their homes.<sup>18</sup>

In 1996, the welfare laws were reformed to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a block grant program with rigorous requirements that varied by state to meet

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<sup>16</sup> Conner and White, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Rogers, 154.

any of the “four purposes to provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for at home; to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage; to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.”<sup>19</sup> This new reform encouraged women to get married by undergoing paternity proceedings in hopes to reinstate Black fathers.<sup>20</sup>

Although the government hoped to reinstate Black fathers into the homes, this excluded the men who received a drug conviction. Those men were unable to receive any government aid or housing, which left Black women fatherless and dependent on the government for everything. Unlike the previous welfare program that penalized women for having a father in the home, the new reform penalized women for not having a father in the home, leaving Black women in a worse position.<sup>21</sup> The situation of governmental control over Black women is very reminiscent of slavery where the Black men had no authority in the slave quarters, but the slave master had all authority over the household.

### **The Drug Epidemic**

The drug epidemic is an additional factor that produced absent fathers within the Black community. On the cusp of the Civil Rights Movement, drugs were infiltrated into the Black community leading to a significant decline in the family structure and empowerment of the people. Dr. Charles Lewis states, “The impact of drugs directly

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<sup>19</sup> Kevin D. Roberts, *African American Issues* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 118.

<sup>20</sup> Rogers, 155.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

impacted the mind power and political influence of the black community.”<sup>22</sup> During the Civil Rights Movement, Black support and Black families were steadfast in light of Jim Crow laws, lack of employment, poor housing, and inadequate educational opportunities.<sup>23</sup> Studies show, “in 1950, 91% of African American homes were dual-headed, and though that percentage had decreased to 67.7% by 1970, 54.2% were still headed by two parents as late as 1980.”<sup>24</sup> The elimination of the most influential Black leaders, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., and the dismantling of the Black Panther Party caused significant psychological impacts, leaving the African American community vulnerable to drugs, violence, and meager resources.

President Nixon introduced the term “War on Drugs” to US-American politics in 1971. At the time, conservative forces “called for a condemnation of all unapproved drug use,”<sup>25</sup> leading to the message issued by President Nixon to the Congress that public enemy number one should be drug abuse, meaning the use of all governmentally banned drugs.<sup>26</sup> About ten years later, President Ronald Regan and his administration implemented the War on Drugs in a period when drug use was on a decline. In the early 1980s, the Gallup poll reported that in the United States, only 2 percent of people identified drugs as a significant societal problem. Sadly, by the late 1980s, there was a 60

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<sup>22</sup> *The Black Fatherhood Project*, directed by Jordan Thierry (Dream Chase Media, 2013), DVD.

<sup>23</sup> Conner and White, 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*; Also see McAdoo, 118–38.

<sup>25</sup> James Kilgore, *Understanding Mass Incarceration: A People’s Guide to the Key Civil Rights Struggle of Our Time* (New York: New Press, 2015), 60, ProQuest.

<sup>26</sup> Kilgore, 60.

percent increase.<sup>27</sup> By the mid-1980s, the crack epidemic had devastating impacts on the African American community when “tens of thousands of people became dependent on this ‘rock’ form of cocaine.”<sup>28</sup> In 1996, stories were released to the media tying “members of the CIA to the origins of crack cocaine and alleged that a specific drug dealer, Freeway Ricky Ross, was a major conduit for CIA-sourced crack that flooded many African American communities.”<sup>29</sup> In *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander highlights the 1998 CIA admission:

The guerrilla armies it supported in Nicaragua were smuggling illegal drugs into the United States—drugs that were making their way on to the streets of the inner-city black neighborhood in the form of crack cocaine. The CIA also admitted that, in the midst of the War on Drugs, it blocked law enforcement efforts to investigate illegal drug networks that were helping to fund its covert war in Nicaragua.<sup>30</sup>

The implementation of the War on Drugs right before the crack epidemic in African American communities across the nation, leads some to believe that the crack boom was a genocidal plot<sup>31</sup> and race-based punishment because of the federal sentencing guidelines. The sentencing guidelines established mandatory sentencing that was harsher for crack than that of cocaine. For one ounce of crack, men received the same prison sentence as a person with one hundred ounces of cocaine.<sup>32</sup> Since crack was prominent in

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Kilgore, 62.

<sup>32</sup> *I 3<sup>th</sup>*, directed by Ava DuVernay, (Forward Movement, 2016), <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80091741>.

the African American community and cocaine more prominent in White communities, “black men were being jailed for possessing small amounts of drugs for their personal use rather than for sale or distribution,”<sup>33</sup> whereas White men caught with cocaine were not getting sent to prison but instead received a slap on the wrist.<sup>34</sup>

For those addicted to crack cocaine, the obsession for the drug dominated their lives. Their families were not a primary focus; many users organized their lives to support their drug habits and not their families: “The subcultural behaviors associated with crack leads to interpersonal violence, duplicity in relationships, increased prostitution, child neglect and abuse, family dissolution,”<sup>35</sup> and incarceration. With the desire for drug abuse greater than the desire for family, most crack users brought great disappointment to their children, who were unable to be dependent on them, creating a more significant burden on their extended families. Mothers and maternal relatives were left responsible for rearing the family in the poor, poverty-stricken urban neighborhood. Without the competent direction of Black fathers, most male children sought fatherly guidance and comfort in gangs. For daughters, they found solace in the arms of men or helping raise their families.

During the Clinton Administration, the implementation of stricter drug sentences and legal barriers for drug convicted felons, even after serving their prison sentence reduced the number of Black men from their families and community. These restrictions

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<sup>33</sup> Conner and White, 11.

<sup>34</sup> DuVernay.

<sup>35</sup> Eloise Dunlap, Andrew Golub, and Bruce D. Johnson, “The Severely-Distressed African American Family in the Crack Era: Empowerment is not Enough,” *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 33, no.1 (2006): 120.

systemically forced broken homes, leaving Black single mothers solely responsible for raising their children without any emotional, financial, or spiritual support from inside the home:

In 1996 the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act facilitated lifetime bans on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF, or “welfare”) and Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps) for those with felony drug convictions, including marijuana possession. He [Clinton] also developed a “one strike and you’re out” policy for public housing, allowing local housing authorities to exclude anyone with a drug offense. The housing policy effectively blocked the reunification of families of those returning from prison, forcing parents, siblings, or partners to choose between their homes and their loved ones.<sup>36</sup>

After the crack epidemic, other drugs were introduced to the community, and the cycle of absent Black fathers continued because of substance abuse and incarceration. From 1980 to 2005, drug arrests tripled, leading to enormous increases in prison populations.<sup>37</sup> The War on Drugs was the motivation for one of the most influential factors in the dismantling of the Black community, mass incarceration.

### **Mass Incarceration**

Mass incarceration has been one of the most devastating acts to dismantle the Black family and reinforce absent fathers within the Black community. The first mass incarceration of the African American community was slavery. In 1865, the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment abolished slavery in the United States: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly

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<sup>36</sup> Kilgore, 67.

<sup>37</sup> Kilgore, 69.

convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”<sup>38</sup>

The crime clause in the constitution allowed for the government to create a loophole to re-enslave any person, particularly a Black person, for any minor crime, to help rebuild the southern economy after the demise of slavery.

Over the years, the narrative surrounding African American men became demonized in society through the media. Vulgar figures were used to reinforce the message that Whites should fear Black men since they were out of control, rapists and criminals, and a threat of evil to White women.<sup>39</sup> The result of the fear inflicted by the negative publicity caused Whites to commit lynchings, Ku Klux Klan rebirth, and Jim Crow laws solidifying the inferiority of African Americans. During the Civil Rights Era, the government and media depicted Black leaders as criminals. Identifying Black men as criminals or any other derogatory term was a tactic for dehumanization that encouraged incarceration rather than freedom and justice.

During the Nixon era, the idea of a war on crime to bring back law and order to a country because of the increased crime rates was introduced. On the surface, it may seem decent, but Richard Nixon was using coded anti-Black rhetoric:<sup>40</sup>

H. R. Haldeman, one of Nixon’s key advisers, recalls that Nixon himself deliberately pursued a Southern, racial strategy: “He [President Nixon] emphasized that you are to face the fact that the whole problem is really blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “United States of America 1789 (rev. 1992),” Constitute, assessed November 30, 2019, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United\\_States\\_of\\_America\\_1992](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United_States_of_America_1992).

<sup>39</sup> DuVernay.

<sup>40</sup> Alexander, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

In the 70s, President Nixon introduced the War on Drugs and by the 80s, President Reagan implemented the strategy of criminalizing the use of illegal drugs instead of making it a health issue, which caused the prison population to skyrocket. The African American community was the target of choice for the extreme policing to rid the neighborhoods of drugs and its men. The prison population in 1970 was 357,292. In 1980 the population drastically increased to 513,900; in 1985, the prison population increased to 759,100.<sup>42</sup> The mass incarceration of Black men left Black women responsible for raising their children by themselves, furthering the need for government assistance to help financially provide for the children living in low-income, impoverished areas. Michelle Alexander cites, “By waging war on drug users and dealers, Reagan made good on his promise to crack down on the racially defined ‘others’—the undeserving.”<sup>43</sup>

During the Reagan administration, the government allocated millions of dollars to build more prisons and jail facilities, while also militarizing police departments to complete extreme forms of policing.<sup>44</sup> The Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team were units for commando raids. Drug squads participated in entrapment schemes and networks of spies were all needed specialties added to law enforcement agencies.<sup>45</sup> With the same artillery as military branches, “local police drug squads began to operate as if they were engaged in wartime military operations and Blacks were the enemy.”<sup>46</sup> The

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<sup>42</sup> DuVernay.

<sup>43</sup> Alexander, 49.

<sup>44</sup> Kilgore, 63.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

anti-drug allocation for the Department of Defense increased from \$33 million in 1981 to \$1,042 million in 1991.<sup>47</sup>

With the revised prison sentencing guidelines, the Clinton Administration caused more damage to the African American community than any of its predecessors: “The bill created dozens of new federal capital crimes, mandated life sentences for three-time offenders, and authorized more than \$16 billion for state prison grants and expansion of state and local police forces.”<sup>48</sup> The mandatory minimums and “Three Strikes You’re Out” law caused the prison population to increase to 1,179,200. President Clinton’s welfare reform limited recipients to a five-year maximum for receiving assistance and, as previously stated, a lifetime ban on assistance for those with a drug conviction. The funding for public housing was decreased to supplement the prison construction budget. Clinton also allowed convicts to be excluded from receiving public housing. The changes implemented by President Clinton were seen as targeting ethnic minorities and the poor because they were the ones predominantly using public assistance and being criminalized. Those with convictions were left homeless, locked out from society, and unable to receive federal aid, repeating the cycle of illegal behavior as a means of survival, leading to further imprisonment. The prison population continued to rise because of mass incarceration. By 2000 the total was 2,015,300, and Black men account for 878,400 of the population—nearly 44 percent of prisoners.<sup>49</sup> Michelle Alexander explains:

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Alexander, 57.

<sup>49</sup> DuVernay, 40:51 and 43:26.

The law and order perspective, first introduced during the peak of the Civil Rights Movement by rabid segregationist, had become nearly hegemonic two decades later. By the mid-1990s, no serious alternative to the War on Drugs and “get tough” movement were being entertained in mainstream political discourse. Once again, in response to a major disruption in the prevailing racial order—this time the civil rights gains of the 1960s—a new system of racialized social control was created by exploiting the vulnerabilities and racial resentments of poor and working-class whites. More than 2 million people found themselves behind bars at the turn of the twenty-first century, millions more were relegated to the margins of mainstream society, banished to a political and social space not unlike Jim Crow, where discrimination in employment, housing, and access to education was perfectly legal and where they could be denied the right to vote. The system functioned relatively automatically, and the prevailing system of racial meanings, identities, and ideologies already seemed natural. Ninety percent of those admitted to prison for drug offenses in many states were black or Latino, yet the mass incarceration of communities of color was explained in race-neutral terms, an adaptation to the needs and demands of the current political climate. The New Jim Crow was born.<sup>50</sup>

As mass incarceration continues to be presented in unbiased contexts to the majority culture, communities of color are undergoing drastic changes. Of the Black men incarcerated, 45–55 percent have children. Studies show that children with incarcerated parents are more likely to embrace feelings of shame, perform poorly in school, have weakened ties to parents, lose financial support, and have an increased risk of abuse or neglect.<sup>51</sup> The emotional and psychological development may be disrupted because of the trauma experienced by the father being incarcerated. The presence of a father is vital to the health and emotional stability of a child. Without it, children will search for anything to fill the void created by the father, which may lead them to repeat the same dysfunctional cycle they have been privy too.

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<sup>50</sup> Alexander, 57–58.

<sup>51</sup> Thierry, et al.

## **Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter was to explore four systemic factors that contribute to the creation and reinforcement of the absent Black father: slavery, poverty, drug epidemic, and mass incarceration. Other important contributing factors like divorce, death, or personal choice may lead to absent fathers but are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Systemic racism has been the vehicle used for centuries to demean and diminish the Black family from being equal to White families. The implementation of biased government policies, demonization through the media, traumatizing fear inflicted by lynching, murder, and the Ku Klux Klan, along with the new enslavement of mass incarceration, has resulted in the dismantling of the African American family. For generations, Black women were left solely responsible for protecting, raising, and nurturing their families with minimal assistance and protection from men. The wounds created in these women are not only a result of the absent father but the systemic oppression that drives the inequality.

CHAPTER 3:  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

God, the Father, is recognized as the first person of the Trinity within Christian Theology. The formulated doctrine of the Trinity asserts the truth that God is one in being or essence who exists eternally in three distinct coequal “persons.” The term “person” affirms the I-thou of a personal relationship or love within the triune Godhead.<sup>1</sup> By nature, God, the Father, is self-existing and the creator of the heavens and earth. God is personal and relational to his creation, as well as a spirit that dwells in eternity. God, the Father, is known as Most High, almighty, omnipresent, omniscient, loving, and most holy. He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him and cannot lie. God is merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abundant in truth and goodness, and forgiving of sins. God as Father can be defined by personal experiences with fathers, culture, and anthropology in addition to biblical theology.<sup>2</sup> This chapter discusses the various fatherly attributes God displays within the context of the Old and New Testaments.

**God the Father in the Old Testament**

The Old Testament demonstrates the parental relationship between God and the nation of Israel. God demonstrates the attributes of being a nurturing, providing, protecting, trustworthy, patient, forgiving, validating, loving, and knowing father to the

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<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), 462.

<sup>2</sup> Mark E. Strong, *Church for the Fatherless* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 132.

children of Israel throughout the Old Testament. The father/son relationship began as the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God introduced his fatherhood to Moses while providing instructions to speak to Pharaoh in Exodus 4:22–23. He said, “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.” After acknowledging his fatherhood, God immediately delivered the children of Israel out of the bondage they were experiencing in Egypt through the leadership of Moses. As the children of Israel journeyed through the wilderness, God took the initiative to develop a closer, more intimate relationship with Israel when he introduced himself after making a covenant on Mt. Sinai.

In Exodus 20:2, God identifies himself as “The Lord your God.” In Hebrew, the word *Lord* is יהוה. The transliteration is *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*, which is the personal name of God that means “He who is truly present.”<sup>3</sup> *Yahweh* “is a combination of the tetragrammaton (YHWH) with the vowels of ‘Adhonay, transliterated as Yehowah, but read aloud by the Hebrews ‘adonay).”<sup>4</sup> *Jehovah* describes God as the faithful and dependable God who can be fully trusted. It can also mean, “I will always be what I have always been.”<sup>5</sup> The word for *God* in Exodus 20:2 is אֱלֹהִים, or *Elohim*. This Hebrew term

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<sup>3</sup> “God, Names of—International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,” Blue Letter Bible, accessed October 26, 2019, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=IT0003853>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Robert S. McGee, Pat Springle, and Jim Craddock, *Your Parents and You: How Our Parents Shape Our Self Concept, Our Perception of God, and Our Relationships with Others*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 101.

is made up of two words: *El* and *Alah*: “EL means ‘unlimited strength, energy, might and power’ and ALAH, meaning ‘to swear, declare or make a covenant.’ Together, they describe God as One of infinite strength and faithfulness.”<sup>6</sup> Not only does God present himself as an intimate, powerful, and faithful God, he also demonstrated his presence by dwelling among the children of Israel in the Tabernacle of Meeting. The cloud of the Lord would cover the tabernacle and His glory would fill it. Whenever the cloud of the Lord moved off of the tabernacle, the children of Israel would journey: “For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.”<sup>7</sup>

While journeying through the wilderness for over forty years, God the father sustained the children of Israel by quenching their thirst with water from rocks, providing quail and manna to eat, and keeping their clothes and shoes from withering. The purpose of the various provisions was to encourage loyalty and devotion to God. In Deuteronomy 7:6–8, Moses reminded the children of Israel of God’s loving kindness by outlining their new identity as a people chosen by God to be a unique treasure above all other people groups. In chapter 14:1, Moses explained the significance of being a chosen people to the Lord; they were His children. As children of God, they were not to engage in pagan practices such as cutting themselves or shaving their heads for the dead, which would defile God’s great name.

God also shows the attribute of being a protective father. In four of the most notable battles, Israel faced Jericho in Joshua 6, the Midianites in Judges 7–8, Goliath

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 40:38.

and the Philistines in 1 Samuel 17, and Ammon, Moab, and Mt. Seir in 2 Chronicles 20. God provided supernatural assistance to ensure Israel's victory. Before the battles, God would inform Israel that he would give their enemies into their hands. In 2 Chronicles 20, Israel did not have to fight at all. The Lord instructed Judah and King Jehoshaphat not to be afraid of the armies because the battle was the Lord's and not theirs. In this instance, God used a confusing spirit to cause the armies to turn on each other. Because of God's unwavering protection, Israel declared in Psalm 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." In 2 Samuel 22, David sang a song recounting the ways God protected and delivered him from all of his enemies. David declared God to be his rock, fortress, deliverer, strength, shield, horn of his salvation, stronghold, refuge, Savior, support, lamp, and power. These terms demonstrate the vastness of the security God provides as a protective father.

God was a patient and faithful father to Israel throughout their struggle with idolatry. The temptation to lean into idolatry started during their time in Egypt and concluded once they were in captivity. During the time of the Kings, Israel spent 390 years, and Judah spent forty years, in idolatry. In Ezekiel 20, the Lord recounts Israel's various acts of rebellion and disobedience to the elders of Israel. He also reminded the elders of the oath the nation made with God in Exodus 20:3–4, where they agreed to not worship any other gods before God. Nor would they make for themselves carved images that reflect any animal that God created. Although Israel failed to keep their agreement and continued worshipping the gods of the neighboring nations, God delayed punishment by sending prophets to remind Israel of his statutes and expectations. Hosea 11:1–4

(AMP) shows God extending love, compassion, and patience to Israel by guiding and healing them:

When Israel was a child [a young nation], I loved him, and I called My son out of Egypt. The more they [the prophets] called them [to repentance and obedience], the more they went away from them; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning incense to the carved images. Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them in My arms [nurturing the young nation]; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them gently with cords of a man, with bonds of love [guiding them], and I was to them as one who lifts up and eases the yoke [of the law] over their jaws; and I bent down to them and fed them.

Through the prophets, God requested Israel to repent and turn from their idolatry and love the Lord completely. God spoke to Ezekiel concerning Israel: “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the LORD GOD: Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations.’”<sup>8</sup>

Not only did God acknowledge the fathership of the nation of Israel, but He also recognized himself as a father of particular individuals in Israel. In 1 Samuel 13:14, God specifically sought out David to be the replacement King of Israel because he was a man after his own heart. The relationship David cultivated with God was sensitive to the guidance and the will of God. During David’s reign, he demonstrated the importance of being obedient to God and carrying out the Lord’s commands. The Psalms, written by David, illustrate the intimate and transparent relationship between David and God. David exemplified the type of king that God outlined in Deuteronomy 17:18–20 to govern over the nation of Israel. In 2 Samuel 7:1–16, God made a covenant with David, establishing a royal dynasty from his lineage that will last forever. In verse 14, God declares that David’s son will be his son: “I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits

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<sup>8</sup> Ezekiel 14:6.

iniquity, I will chasten him with a rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men.”

With God taking the responsibility of being a father to David’s son, it shows God’s desire for a consistent and close relationship with humanity.

In two of David’s Psalms, he recognized the intentionality of God relative to the fatherless. Psalm 27:10 states, “When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me.” Psalm 68:5 declares God to be “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation.” Christopher J. H. Wright, in his book, *Knowing God the Father through the Old Testament*, provides further insight into the fatherly attributes God displays within these verses:

It is striking that in one of the very few Old Testament texts that actually speak directly of God as “father,” the prime focus is on God’s loving, protecting and defending stance toward the weak and vulnerable in human society—as typified in the most vulnerable of all, orphaned children. God is Father to those who have lost the natural bonds of human protection, whether because of rejection, or because of natural bereavement.<sup>9</sup>

The word *fatherless* is the Hebrew term אִתּוֹם or *yathowm*, “meaning to be lonely; a bereaved person:—fatherless (child), orphan.”<sup>10</sup> The Old Testament houses forty-two “fatherless” scriptures. Within those scriptures, God admonishes the people to administer justice and fair treatment to the less fortunate.

The Daughters of Zeholophed in Numbers 27:1–11 were fatherless daughters who received justice and fair treatment from God as he instructed the Israelites. The scriptures state these women stood before Moses and requested their father’s inheritance since he

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<sup>9</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing God the Father through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2007), 37.

<sup>10</sup> “H3490-Yathowm- Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon (KJV),” Blue Letter Bible, accessed November 3, 2019, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=H3490&t=KJV>.

died in the wilderness without having a male child. Unsure of what to do, Moses sought the Lord for direction. The Lord instructed Moses to give the daughters the inheritance. God then proceeded to establish laws that would allow for fatherless daughters to receive their father's inheritance upon his death. If no children, then the inheritance would then be distributed to relatives.

Another instance of God being the special guardian of a fatherless daughter in the Old Testament is in the narrative of Esther. Esther was a young orphaned Jewish woman living in Shushan, the citadel of Persia, with her uncle Mordecai the scribe, because her parents died. Mordecai's grandfather was taken into captivity by King Nebuchadnezzar. While in Shushan, King Ahasuerus had a banquet to celebrate his reign over 127 provinces. He called his wife, Queen Vashti to come before the King to show her beauty to the officials and the people. However, Queen Vashti refused to come before the King, leaving him enraged. The King made new decrees that he would find a new wife. Young women, including Esther, were taken into the palace under the custody of Hegai.

Esther found favor with everyone and became queen. Under the advice of Mordecai, she was told not to speak of her Jewish heritage. During her reign as queen, there was a decree that was set to destroy all of the Jews within the provinces of King Ahasuerus. Mordecai informed Esther of the decree, and she decided to help the Jews. After fasting and praying for three days, Esther decided to risk her life and go before King Ahasuerus unsummoned. She received favor from the King, exposing the plan to destroy the Jewish nation, and saving her people from annihilation. The consistent

faithfulness God demonstrated to the fatherless shows his love for them. As his children, God watches and concerns himself with their needs.<sup>11</sup>

### **God the Father in the New Testament**

The New Testament continues to reveal the fatherhood of God to Israel through the intimate father-son relationship with God and Jesus. According to Christian Theology, Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. John 1:1–3 reveals the deity of Jesus when referring to Christ as *λόγος* or the *Word*: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” Jesus had a unique relationship with God since he was the only begotten son that stepped out of eternity into humanity. John 1:14 supports this belief by stating, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Luke 1:26–35 provides the detailed birth announcement of Jesus discussed between the angel Gabriel and Mary.

The angel Gabriel was sent to bring a message of favor and blessings from God to a virgin girl named Mary. The angel informed Mary that God selected her to birth the Messiah, and he was to be named Jesus. Gabriel explained that Jesus would be called the Son of the Most High, He would reign over Israel, and God would give Him the throne of David. He continued to inform Mary of the process of conception: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” Not only was Mary informed

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<sup>11</sup> McGee, Springle, and Craddock, 105.

of the upcoming assignment but her fiancée Joseph was also notified in a dream of Mary's task to birth the son of God. In the dream, Joseph was told to name the child Immanuel, meaning "God with us."

After giving birth to Jesus, Mary and Joseph had experiences with various people, all confirming the initial message of Jesus being the redeemer of Israel. In all of these instances, Mary held all of the comments close to her heart. Twelve years later, Mary was reminded of Jesus calling when he remained in Jerusalem after the Passover Feast. Mary and Joseph did not realize that Jesus was not with the family until three days later when they returned to Jerusalem. Jesus was found in the temple conversing with the religious teachers: "So when they saw Him, they were amazed, and his mother said to Him, 'Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I sought You anxiously.' And He said to them, 'Why did you seek Me? Did you not know I had to be about my Father's business?'"<sup>12</sup>

Years later, Jesus' sonship to God was confirmed outwardly at his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptizer: "Immediately, coming from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, 'You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"<sup>13</sup> The next day John saw Jesus and pronounced to his disciples,

Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world! This is He of whom I said, "After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me." I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "Upon whom you the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He

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<sup>12</sup> Luke 2:48–50.

<sup>13</sup> Mark 1:10–11.

who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.<sup>14</sup>

Jesus’ transfiguration on the mountain is another example of his sonship confirmed to humanity. Peter, James, and John were able to hear God the Father speak from a cloud and acknowledge Jesus as his son, stating, “This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!”<sup>15</sup>

The devil and evil spirits even recognized Jesus’ father-son relationship. During Jesus’ forty-day temptation in the wilderness, the devil propositioned Jesus to do miracles outside of the ordination of God the father. The propositions recorded in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 began by questioning his sonship, asking if he was the Son of God. After successfully overcoming temptation, Jesus began his earthly ministry. In that time, Jesus rebuked the unclean and evil spirits that identified him as either the Son of God<sup>16</sup> or the Son of the Most High God.<sup>17</sup> Jesus told the demons to be quiet and did not allow them to speak because they knew who he was and the authority he possessed.

In the Sermon on the Mount discourse, Jesus presented a new paradigm for God as a close and personal father<sup>18</sup> that instructs his children on the importance of morality and integrity: “The Sermon on the Mount was given as the way of life for the true children of the kingdom of God. It was instruction for those who had responded to Jesus’ invitation to ‘repent.’ The disciples were probably confused as to the nature of

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<sup>14</sup> John 1:29–34.

<sup>15</sup> Luke 9:35.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 8:29 and Luke 4:41.

<sup>17</sup> Mark 5:7.

<sup>18</sup> Strong, 135.

righteousness and God’s kingdom.”<sup>19</sup> In Matthew 5:9, Jesus spoke a blessing over those who are peacemakers and declared they would be called “sons” or “children of God.” Peacemakers shall be called children of God because they express and reflect the character of their father in heaven.<sup>20</sup> In verses 14–16, Jesus continued the idea that as children of God, their moral character reflects their heavenly father by being a light to the world: “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Jesus highlighted how believers’ close relationship with God the father influences their relationships with others in verses 45–48. Since God “loves without distinction,”<sup>21</sup> those who are his children should follow His example when engaging with neighbors and enemies:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even tax collectors do so? Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Earl Radmacher, Ron Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Compact Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 669.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 1445.

<sup>21</sup> Barker, 1447.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew 5:43–48.

In Matthew 6:1–18, Jesus instructed his disciples and the multitude of people present of three essential acts of righteousness: giving, prayer, and fasting. In the instruction, Jesus explained the importance of having pure motives for their actions while providing the proper way to fulfill the three acts of righteousness. When giving to the needy, praying, or fasting, the motive behind those deeds should not be for the approval of men but the approval of God the father. He cited the conditions for either response. If the motive for the acts of righteousness were impure, their reward would come from the men but not the heavenly father. If the motives were pure, their heavenly father would reward them:

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Jesus provided assurance that God is an all-knowing father who is aware of their needs and provides the necessary provisions. Jesus affirmed that as a child of God, there is no need to utilize the same prayer strategies as unbelievers, of using

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18.

meaningless repetitive words: “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.”<sup>24</sup> When engaging in prayer, Jesus insisted that the manner of prayer include an acknowledgment of God as a holy father, requests for his kingdom and engagement, requests for daily provision, forgiveness, direction, and protection.<sup>25</sup>

In Matthew 6:9, Jesus invited his disciples to participate in the same family relationship by instructing them to pray saying, “Our Father.” By saying, “our Father,” Jesus places the disciples in relationship to him as well as to God. The relationship is to be intimate to the point of asking God to meet needs, and it requires obedience to forgive as God forgives.<sup>26</sup>

Jesus encouraged the multitude and his disciples not to worry about the necessities of life, what they would eat, drink, wear, or their future in Matthew 6:25–34 and Luke 12:22–30, instead engaging their faith, trusting that their heavenly Father would provide for his children the same way he provides for his creation. Jesus instructed them to shift their focus on seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to them.<sup>27</sup>

Jesus revealed God as a validating father in John 5:16–23. After healing a man on the Sabbath, the religious leaders were upset and ready to kill Jesus because he broke the law and claimed to be equal with God. In this passage, Jesus notified the religious leaders that God validated his actions since He only did what He saw his Father doing. As a

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew 6:8.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 6:9–13: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts. As we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

<sup>26</sup> Strong, 135–36.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 6:34.

loving Father, God showed Jesus, current and more significant works that he does. As the Son of God, Jesus was also given the authority to give life, judge matters, and receive the honor. In verses 26–27, Jesus continued discussing the authority given to the Son by the Father: “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.”

As a father, God offers liberation through the Spirit of adoption. In Romans 8:15–17, the sonship offered allows for believers to be called children of God, joint-heirs with Christ, crying “Abba, Father.” For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. God also shows mercy and compassion. Paul emphasized that God is the God of mercies and comfort. In Romans 9:15, Paul states, “For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.” God comforted those amid tribulations in 1 Corinthians 1:3–4.

The fatherly attributes of God described in the Old and New Testaments are very similar to those of a natural father. Since God is the perfect example of what a natural father should be, believers may find rest in knowing that God the Father desires to have a personal relationship with them and will restore any distorted perceptions through his love and guidance. The emotional availability of a father to his daughter has significant

implications on the lives of women, not only in the present day, but also in ancient biblical times.

### **Biblical Examples of Father-Daughter Relationships**

Throughout the Bible, fathers were given specific instructions for raising their children. Colossians 3:21 instructs fathers not to provoke their children, lest they become discouraged. Proverbs 22:6 encourages fathers to raise their children in the ways of the Lord; when they are of age, they will not stray for the instruction. Ephesians 6:4 reminds fathers not to provoke their children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Psalm 103:13 (ESV) shows the significance of compassion from a father to his children: “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.” In Deuteronomy 6:6–9, Moses commanded fathers to teach their children to observe the commandments and statutes of the Lord:

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Although there are a vast number of scriptures referencing how a father should raise his children, the primary focus of the scriptures is on rearing a son and not a daughter. Father-daughter relationships are not the most prominent relationship types represented in the Bible. The laws given by Moses to the nation of Israel concerning father-daughter relationships involve marriage, inheritance, and servanthood. With ancient Israel being a patriarchal society, daughters were not as prized as sons. Edward Bagby Pollards states, “Daughters were not so highly prized as sons, not being usually mentioned by name. A father might sometimes sell his daughter as bondwoman (Ex.

21:7); though not to a foreigner (Ex. 21:8); daughters might sometimes inherit as did sons, but could not take the inheritance outside of the tribe (Num. 36:1–12).”<sup>28</sup> Of all of the father-daughter relationship narratives depicted within scripture, the majority are either dysfunctional or damaging.<sup>29</sup> For the sake of this study, there will be an exploration into four father-daughter relationships: Jairus and his daughter, Laban and his daughters Leah and Rachel; Jacob and Dinah; and David and Tamar. Identifying the father type and potential wound within each of the father-daughter narratives demonstrates that no one is exempt from experiencing father wounds.

The narrative of Jairus and his daughter can be found in three of the four synoptic gospels: Matthew 9:18–26, Mark 5:21–43, and Luke 8:40–56. The text introduces a synagogue leader named Jairus, desperate to find a remedy for his daughter’s illness. Upon seeing Jesus, Jairus fell at his feet, earnestly begging Jesus to come to his home and lay hands on his daughter and heal her. Jairus emphasized that his twelve-year-old daughter was very sick at the point of death. Jesus agreed to his request and began the journey to his home. While on the road, the men received word that Jairus’ daughter had died and no longer needed the Teacher to come to the home. Jesus affirmed Jairus while heading to his home, saying, “Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well.”<sup>30</sup> Once Jesus and his three companions arrived at Jairus’ home, Jesus directed the

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<sup>28</sup> “Daughter,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Blue Letter Bible, accessed November 24, 2019, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=IT0002545>.

<sup>29</sup> Johanna Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press: Scholarship Online: May 2013), <http://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199673827.001.0001>.

<sup>30</sup> Luke 8:50.

mourners and the family out of the home. He healed the daughter in front of her parents, and they were filled with astonishment.

Although there is no extensive back-story offered on Jairus and his daughter, the narrative depicts Jairus as an active, present, and loving father to his twelve-year-old daughter. He did not allow his title as a synagogue leader, or his pride, restrict him from demonstrating his love for his daughter and great faith in Jesus. With this example of a father's love, Jairus' daughter probably would not incur a father-wounded heart. As previously mentioned in chapter one, a father's presence has a significant impact on the psychological, emotional, and relational framework of his daughters.

The account of the father-daughter relationship between Laban and his daughters Leah and Rachel is in Genesis 29 and 31. The foundation of this story is a marriage proposition between Laban and his nephew Jacob for his younger daughter, Rachel. Jacob agrees to work for Laban for seven years; in return, Rachel would become his wife. After Jacob fulfills his seven-year commitment, he requests his wife from Laban. Laban gathered everyone together for the wedding feast, but in the evening, Laban gave his oldest daughter Leah to Jacob instead of his beautiful younger daughter, Rachel. When Jacob realized Laban's deception, he confronted him, stating, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?"<sup>31</sup> Laban informed Jacob of the marital customs of Haran that younger female siblings are not given in marriage before the elder sibling.<sup>32</sup> Then he offered Jacob an option to work an additional seven years to marry Rachel. Twenty years later, Laban confronted Jacob

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<sup>31</sup> Genesis 29:25.

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 29:26.

after receiving word that he left Haran with his livestock, possessions, children, and wives without informing Laban of his departure. After a week of pursuit, Laban found Jacob in the mountains of Gilead, and an intense confrontation ensued. Laban asked Jacob,

What have you done, that you have stolen away unknown to me, and carried away my daughters like captives taken with the sword? Why did you flee away secretly, and steal away from me, and not tell me; for I might have sent you away with joy and songs, with timbrel and harp? And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have done foolishly in so doing. It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, “Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.”<sup>33</sup>

Jacob answered honestly stating “I was afraid, for I thought, you would take your daughters from me by force.”<sup>34</sup> In verse 43, Laban reminded Jacob that everything he had received was from Laban and not of his own doing:

And Laban answered and said to Jacob, “*These* daughters are my daughters, and *these* children *are* my children, and *this* flock is my flock; all that you see *is* mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me.”<sup>35</sup>

The conversation ends with Laban making a covenant with Jacob concerning the treatment of his daughters in verses 49–53:

May the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent one from another. If you afflict my daughters, or if you take other wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us—see, God is witness between you and me!” Then Laban said to Jacob, “Here is this heap and here is this pillar, which I have placed between you and me. This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of

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<sup>33</sup> Genesis 31:26–20.

<sup>34</sup> Genesis 31:26.

<sup>35</sup> Genesis 31:43–44.

their father judge between us.” And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.

In these passages, Laban demonstrated the attributes of a loving, protective, and present father concerned for the well-being of his daughters. Even with Laban’s deception toward Jacob during the marital feast, he inadvertently honored Leah. He spared Leah the experience of the societal shame of her younger sister marrying before her. Laban also demonstrated his love for his daughters by pursuing after them after hearing they left abruptly with Jacob. Laban protected his daughters from any significant mistreatment from Jacob for the first fourteen years of Rachel and Leah’s married lives. Now that Jacob was moving back to Canaan, Laban had to devise a plan that would ensure his daughters were not privy to mistreatment or humiliation. Before departing back to Haran, Laban blessed and kissed his family. Based on the information provided in these passages, Leah and Rachel would not incur father-wounded hearts because of their father’s physical presence, emotional support, and tender care. The relational complexities between the women and Jacob are not the result of their father’s influence, but rather their insecurities surrounding marriage and sisterly competition.

The father-daughter narrative of Jacob and Dinah is in Genesis 34. Dinah was the daughter of Leah and Jacob. She went to explore the land of Shechem by herself and was accosted and raped by Shechem, the son of Hamor, the Hivite. Although Shechem had an intense attraction for Dinah and requested for her to be his wife, his actions were disgraceful in the sight of her family. After Jacob heard the news of Dinah’s defilement, he waited to tell his sons until they came back from the fields. When Dinah’s brothers heard about the defilement from Hamor the father of Shechem, they “were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob’s

daughter, a thing which ought not to be done.”<sup>36</sup> Jacob stepped aside and allowed his sons to continue the bridal proposition with Hamor and Shechem for Dinah. The men come to an agreement: Dinah would marry Shechem if all the men of the land became circumcised like their family. Hamor and Shechem agreed, not realizing Dinah’s brothers spoke deceitfully because of their anger concerning the treatment of Dinah.

Three days after the men of Shechem were circumcised, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers killed all of the men in the land. Her other brothers plundered the city, and they removed Dinah from the house of Shechem. Jacob was distraught with his sons once he found out about the massacre: “Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, ‘You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I.’”<sup>37</sup> The chapter ends with the brothers responding in verse 31, “Should he treat our sister like a harlot?”

Based on the narrative provided, Jacob would be considered a passive or bystander father that was emotionally unavailable to his daughter. The text does not show Jacob having any emotional response to Dinah after she was raped. Verse 5 states that Jacob remained quiet until his sons arrived and his sons were the ones who had an emotional response. Jacob had the opportunity to defend his daughter to Hamor and Shechem, but he did not. He allowed his sons to converse with Hamor to discuss the bridal dowry. Jacob expelled his frustration to his sons for ruining his reputation among the inhabitants of the land. After defending the honor of Dinah by killing all of the men

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<sup>36</sup> Genesis 34:7.

<sup>37</sup> Genesis 34:30.

of the city, his sons had to remind Jacob that Dinah mattered to them. Dinah would incur a father-wounded heart. She was not protected, affirmed, or acknowledged by her father. Although her brothers came to her aide, a sibling's love cannot fix a father wound.

The story of David and Tamar is found in 2 Samuel 13:1–22. Like Dinah, Tamar was raped as well, but her attacker was her half-brother Amnon: “Tamar was the sister of Absalom and they were the children of David and Maacah, daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. Amnon was David’s firstborn son, he was the child of Ahinoam, the woman of Jezreel.”<sup>38</sup> Over time, Amnon fell in love with his half-sister, Tamar. His feelings for her intensified until he became sick. Amnon was aware that the law forbade any siblings from having a sexual relationship.<sup>39</sup> In verse 5, Jonadab, Amnon’s cousin, devised a plan to get Tamar into proximity of Amnon:

So Jonadab said to him, “Lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill. And when your father comes to see you, say to him, ‘Please let my sister Tamar come and give me food, and prepare the food in my sight, that I may see it and eat it from her hand.’” Then Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, “Please let Tamar my sister come and make a couple of cakes for me in my sight, that I may eat from her hand.”

Amnon used the plan and it worked. David instructed Tamar to go to her brother’s house and prepare Amnon food. Tamar made the cakes for Amnon and placed them before him and he refused to eat. Amnon ordered everyone to leave his home and requested for Tamar to serve him in his bedroom. Once she arrived in the room, Amnon propositioned Tamar to sleep with him and Tamar refused. In verses 12 and 13, Tamar tried to reason with Amnon by reminding him of the law while also asking questions that would affect

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<sup>38</sup> Radmacher, Allen, and House, 195.

<sup>39</sup> Leviticus 18:11: “The nakedness of your father’s wife’s daughter, begotten by your father—she is your sister—you shall not uncover her nakedness.”

his future endeavors. Sadly, Amnon refused to listen and raped Tamar (v. 14). After fulfilling his lustful desires, Amnon's love turned into hate and he sent her away from him (v. 15). Before leaving, Tamar placed ashes on her head, tears her robe, laid her hand on her head, and wept bitterly (v. 19). Absalom spoke to Tamar about the situation and informed her to keep quiet and not make this a public scandal. Tamar ended up living a desolate life in the house of Absalom (v. 21). When David heard about the rape, he was outraged. Two years later, Absalom killed Amnon (v. 22).

From this narrative, David would be classified as a passive father because he failed to protect his daughter after being informed of Tamar's rape. Kenneth Barker, in his commentary on David's response to Tamar's rape, agrees that David's response was not sufficient as a father or king.

Although David was incensed by Amnon's rape of Tamar, there is no record that he took any punitive action against him. Perhaps the memory of his own sin with Bathsheba adversely affected his judicious handling of the matter. Whatever the reason, David abdicated his responsibility both as a king and as a father. This disciplinary leniency toward his sons eventually led to the death of Amnon and the revolts of Absalom and Adonijah.<sup>40</sup>

David ignored Tamar after finding out about her rape. Nowhere in the text does David speak again to Tamar. From the treatment received by her father, Tamar would incur a father-wounded heart. Tamar was left rejected, humiliated, and desolate for the rest of her life. Like Dinah, Tamar's brother Absalom made more of an effort to vindicate his father than his father did. The abandonment experienced by Tamar from her father reinforced the shame brought on by the sexual abuse she endured. Tamar lived a desolate life with a father-wounded heart, even after Absalom avenged her name.

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<sup>40</sup> Barker, 438.

The four father-daughter narratives demonstrated the results of a father's emotional presence or absence in the life of his daughter. The women whose fathers were emotionally present did not incur a wounded heart, but the women with emotionally absent fathers did. Women with father-wounded hearts may need God to restore their hearts and correct their identity narrative.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to gain an accurate perspective of God the Father examined through both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. In the Old Testament, the fatherhood of God was displayed in the father-son relationship of the nation of Israel, with particular people like King David and Solomon, and the fatherless. In the New Testament, the fatherhood of God was revealed through the unique sonship of Jesus, through the Spirit of Adoption, and the new paradigm of a close and personal God through the Sermon on the Mount discourse. Finally, four biblical father-daughter relationships were highlighted as an illustration of the emotional presence or absence of a father and the impacts on their daughter's heart. The next chapter focuses on the research methodology and the alternative perspective to traditional Christian Theology and the Father God image relative to father wounds.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

This dissertation is intentionally biased toward African American father-daughter relationships. The Black American experience is unique in that the painful sufferings of race-based slavery among these people contributed to the erosion of the Black family. However, father wounds are not limited to this group alone. Depending on one's circumstances, this issue can exist in any home environment.

Given my personal experience, as narrated in chapter one, I address relational challenges based on my racial dynamics. Therefore, the field research allowed for exploration into the correlation between the relationship of African American daughters and their fathers. In addition, further research underwrites how that relationship has a significant impact on the black woman's perspective of God as a father.

The women who participated in the field research are from various denominations such as Pentecostal, Baptist, Non-Denominational, African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Sabbath Day Adventist Church, which creates the Black Church. The theological ideology and biblical interpretation represented within these denominations would be traditional Christian Theology. The Christian theological perspective and biblical interpretation also provide the basis for the proposed method for healing the image of God caused by father wounds. This chapter also includes and examine alternative theologies and perspectives.

## Design of Study

The mechanisms used to collect the research were surveys and personal interviews. The purpose of using surveys and interviews was to identify the effect of father wounds on women within the Black church. Participants received written notice that this study was entirely voluntary, and they could discontinue at any time. They were also informed that their names would be kept confidential, and pseudonyms would be used if their responses were selected for further use. Since human subjects are a central component in the research, an Institutional Review Board application, survey questionnaire, interview questions, and a copy of the letter of consent were submitted and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Portland Seminary before the research began.

The questionnaire was a composite of twelve short answer and multiple-choice questions. The questions were designed to highlight each woman's relationship with her natural father and God, her perception of God as a father, and how her relationships with her father and God influenced her self-esteem and self-worth. The online survey was created and launched using the Google Forms platform. There is a paper version of the survey for women who preferred not to use computers. The personal interview format incorporated ten to fifteen open-ended questions with a base interview schedule serving as a guide for each interview. Each meeting lasted for an hour or more. The interview questions permitted for an in-depth exploration of the women's experiences concerning the parental relationship with their fathers; how their relationship with their father has shaped their identity and understanding of God; and what process was taken if a change occurred.

Some of the women who participated in the interviews did not hold the same theological perspective. The three theological ideologies represented in the research are traditional Christian, Feminist, and Womanist. Women that held alternative perspectives, answered an additional four questions to the standard list of questions. The additional questions focused on the definition of a *womanist* or a *feminist*. What scripture supports their theology? Finally, they were asked their thoughts on the presentation of patriarchy in theology. Engaging women with differing theological beliefs provided an alternative view to the traditional Christian image of God and furthered the depth of understanding surrounding how father wounds distort Black Christian women's perception of God as Father. Fourteen women agreed to participate in the personal interview process.

## **Findings**

### *Online Survey*

After creating and launching the online survey on the Google Forms platform, over forty women volunteered to participate in the survey. Each participant had the option to complete the survey anonymously or provide her contact information. Of the forty-two responses, only four women chose to use the anonymous option. Participants received written notice that their names would be kept confidential, and pseudonyms would be used if their responses were selected for further use.

The online survey was comprised of four multiple-choice and eight short answer questions. Since this survey was voluntary, every question was not required to be answered, resulting in four unanswered questions. The first multiple-choice question asked participants to "Identify the type of father that had the greatest impact on their life" (Good or Bad)," choosing from Biological Father, Stepfather, Father Figure, and Other.

Thirty-three women (eighty percent) of women specified that their Biological Father had the most significant impact on their lives. Six women (fourteen percent) of women identified a Father Figure, two women (four percent) of the women selected Step-Father, and one woman (two percent) recognized Other as having the most significant impact on their lives. The “other” was specified as their Heavenly Father.

The follow-up short answer question asks, “How has the presence/non-presence of your father affected your self-esteem and self-worth?” Darci shared how her father negatively impacted her self-esteem and self-worth:

Not having a conventional relationship with either one my biological or stepdad has definitely affected my self-esteem. I would always see my friends with their two-parent homes, and I always thought that they were so lucky to have the love of both parents. When I was a kid, I thought that my biological dad did not love me because he was not as present in my life as all my other friend’s dads. It made me think that I did something wrong to push him out of my life; now, I know that was his choice, not mine. Also, having a dad who is in prison has affected my esteem as well. I felt that people thought we were terrible people for loving him and giving him such high praise as a dad, even though he is in prison.<sup>1</sup>

Tabitha shared the positive impacts the presence of her father had on her self-esteem and self-worth. She replies,

The presence of my father has had a positive impact on my self-esteem/worth. He shows me that I am special. By opening doors, supporting me in my goals, and letting me know that I matter. My self-esteem/worth is high because my father taught me not to settle for anything and that I deserve to be treated well.<sup>2</sup>

The second multiple-choice question asked participants, “What do you need the most from your father?” The options to select from were Love, Time, Assurance, Identity, All of the Above, and Other. Sixty-one percent of the women selected All of the

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<sup>1</sup> Surveyed on 3/21/2018.

<sup>2</sup> Surveyed on 3/15/2018.

Above (love, time, assurance, and identity) the most from their fathers. Fourteen percent of women identified they need their father's love the most. Fourteen percent of women selected Other. The "other" was specified as trust, honesty, respect, listening, open mind, and understanding. Seven percent of women stated they needed Assurance the most from their fathers. Four percent of women identified Time as what they needed most from their father. Zero percent of women identified Identity as what they needed most from their father.

The third multiple-choice question asked participants, "How active is your father in your life?" The selection options consisted of Very Active, Active, Inconsistent, Never Met Him, and Other. Thirty-eight percent of women identified their father was Very Active in their lives. Nineteen percent of women selected Active for their father's presence in their lives. Twenty-four percent of women's fathers were inconsistent. Nineteen percent of women chose Other. Seventeen percent of the women that selected Other stated their father was deceased. The remaining two percent stated their father was not present unless she called him. Zero percent of women identified they never met their father.

The short answer follow-up question asked the participants to "Describe your relationship with your father." Melanie described her father as having an inconsistent presence:

I have a biological father who is incredibly fun-loving. However, he did not raise me because he was on drugs. He and my mother were both drug addicts but have stayed together for over forty years. He was a former Motown singer and had a near run at a successful career. When his career did not take off as planned, he kept the lifestyle. I went into foster care at six years old, along with six other siblings. I then went to stay with my father's mother, my Grandmother. She taught us to love our parents despite their addiction. We went back into foster care when I was twelve. Quite frankly, I was so angry with my mother, I did not care

too much about my dad. He was funny and happy all the time despite his circumstances. Today, I love him because I know he is my father, but I do not have any sincere feelings towards him. He is like a funny uncle with no substance.<sup>3</sup>

Arlene described how her father's active presence influenced her life:

First, I admire my father for all that he has sacrificed for my family and me and for providing a great example of what it means to be a father and a man. We have a loving and healthy relationship; I always wanted to be like him growing up. I feel that I can tell him anything, and he will listen and give me honest, helpful feedback. It is difficult because I do not see him often because he lives so far away. I miss being closer to him. Although my parents divorced when I was in college, he never allowed that to impact our relationship.<sup>4</sup>

The fourth multiple-choice question was, "Do you perceive God as a Father?"

The options were Yes, No, and Maybe. Ninety-three percent of women said Yes, they perceive God as a father. Seven percent of women selected Maybe they see God as a father. Zero percent of women specified that they did not see God as a Father. The follow-up short answer question asked the women, "How has your relationship with your father affected your view of God?" Candace replied, "I unconsciously place my father's weaknesses and failures onto God."<sup>5</sup> Candace identified in previous answers that her father was inconsistent in her life, and she does see God as a Father.

Darbi shared, "I think that the lack of presence from my biological and stepdad, makes me not want to trust other men. When God is personified as a dad, and it makes me slightly hesitant to pursue a relationship with God."<sup>6</sup> Darbi identified her stepfather as

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<sup>3</sup> Surveyed on 4/9/2018.

<sup>4</sup> Surveyed on 5/11/2018.

<sup>5</sup> Surveyed on 3/15/2018.

<sup>6</sup> Surveyed on 3/21/2018.

being active, and her biological father as physically present, but emotionally absent. She also selected Maybe for identifying God as a father. Tasha stated, “I have a hard time viewing God as loving and relational. I often feel like he is authoritarian.”<sup>7</sup> Tasha does perceive God as a father. She described her relationship with her biological father as being emotionally distant and awkward, even though he was active or present in her life.

An additional question asked the participant to “Describe God’s role as a Father.” Some of the responses for this answer included provider, nurturing, protector, healer of emotional wounds, leader, loving, dependable, consistent, comforting, forgiving, disciplines, guides, grace-giving, coach, creator, and cheerleader. A similar question asked participants, “What are some characteristics of God that are similar to an earthly father?” The responses were almost identical to the answers given for describing God’s role as a father. The women displayed a connection between their expectations for their father and their perception of God as a father.

### *Interviews*

Seven African American women agreed to complete the research interviews. The age of the women varied from the mid-thirties to the early seventies. All of the interviews were one-on-one, either face-to-face or over the phone. The women were able to answer all of the questions provided. Each woman answered ten open-ended questions surrounding their relationship with their father. How their self-esteem or self-worth was impacted by their father? Their perception of God? If their relationship with their father

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<sup>7</sup> Surveyed on 3/26/2018.

affected their understanding of God as a father? Has God affected their self-esteem or self-worth? Lastly, to identify the transformation process taken if a change occurred.

The participants were asked to “Describe their relationship with their father.”

Isabella grew up with no father figure in her home. Her mother wore both hats. She did not realize the necessity of a father until she started dating. She did not meet her father until she was an adult. Isabella had no expectations for her relationship with her father. He was very supportive of her endeavors and gave her valuable advice. She appreciated his effort to reach out and build their relationship. They would always talk about the Lord and how much of a great dad he was to her.<sup>8</sup>

Olivia described her relationship with her father as “close.” Since she was a little girl, she was always closer to her mother because her father was physically present but emotionally absent. Her father was a recovering alcoholic and addict. Their relationship began to improve when she was in high school. During that time, her father was emotionally present but physically absent.<sup>9</sup>

Emma described her relationship with her father as “complicated.” Like Isabella, she was not raised with her father. Now as an adult with her own family, Emma’s father is living with her. There are times Emma experiences her father trying to parent her instead of having an adult relationship with her.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Interviewed on 4/19/2018.

<sup>9</sup> Interviewed on 4/20/2018.

<sup>10</sup> Interviewed on 4/16/2018.

Mia was not raised having a relationship with her natural father either. Her grandfather had the greatest impact on her life from the age of one to sixteen. Her fondest memory was going to the hospital, visiting the sick with him.<sup>11</sup>

The follow-up asked, “How has your relationship with your father affected your self-esteem and self-worth?” As a child, Isabella felt love was conditional, and it should be earned. Once she met her father, Isabella felt he demonstrated unconditional love with security and comfort. She is now struggling with her self-esteem and intimacy because of her father’s death. Olivia shared that she had low self-esteem for most of her life. When dating, she was attracted to guys that she needed to help or fix. Watching her father’s unfaithfulness and addiction break down her family structure, and her mother continuing to stay in an unhealthy marriage caused Olivia to believe that it was okay to excuse the bad behavior of a significant other. She settled for dysfunctional relationships, thinking that was normal. Olivia’s father also taught her how to be emotionally silent and passive.

Emma’s self-esteem and self-worth were negatively affected by her father’s absence. Because of her father’s absence, Emma has a hard time trusting, loving, and being vulnerable, causing her to become extremely independent. Since she did not receive direction from her father, Emma creates unrealistic expectations for relationships. Similar to the other women, Mia had low self-esteem, as well. The cause of her low self-esteem was that she did not have her father’s voice of affirmation to know that she was loved. Mia believes that if her father were present, her life would have been different.

The next question asked to the participants was, “Do you perceive God as a father?” Isabella does perceive God as a father. Based on the teachings she received from

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<sup>11</sup> Interviewed on 4/17/2018.

church, God automatically became a father to her. God provided the comfort and consistency that she needed. Isabella even prayed to meet her biological father, and her prayer was answered. Olivia perceives God as her father. God shows his love for Olivia by loving, nurturing, empowering, validating, providing, and creating safety. She is appreciative of God's unconditional love, the constant reminder of her identity in Christ, and His plans for her life.

Emma also perceives God as a father. For her, it was easy to perceive God as a father because she did not have a father to compare him too. Emma anchors herself in the validation and love received from God. Like the others, Mia perceives God as a father, as well. She calls him "Abba" or "Daddy God." Mia felt like an orphan, so lost and very depressed, and was reminded that God was her father and would never leave or forsake her. She heard the scriptures so bright that her spirit felt revived. The heaviness and depression were gone.

The next question the participants answered is, "How has your relationship with your father affected your perception of God as a father?" Isabella's relationship with her father caused her to automatically see God as a Father. By not having a father, God was there to fill the voids in her heart. Olivia's relationship with her father allowed her to recognize her father's imperfections in light of God's perfection. Her heavenly father can provide to her the things her natural father is unable to provide for her. Mia does not believe that her relationship with her father impacted her perception of God. Mia keeps her relationship with God and her father separate. God has reversed the pain experienced by her natural father. For Emma, her relationship with her father did affect her perception of God. She did not know how to be fathered, so she could not recognize that God was

caring and affirming of her. Sometimes Emma struggles with accepting God's love because her father did not unconditionally love her.

An additional question the participants were to answer was, "How has your self-esteem and self-worth attributed to your relationship with God?" Isabella has seen an improvement in her self-esteem and self-worth. She is more confident and calm. Isabella noticed her confidence fluctuates based on the time she invests in her spiritual formation. She is more confident when she is closer to God and weaker when she is distant. Over time, Olivia, has seen her worth increase through the revelation of God, which has confirmed her identity. Mia also saw an increase in her self-esteem and self-worth once she established a secure relationship with Christ. She has received confidence and courage to come out of her shell and be vulnerable to others. God has even shown her how to love those she has resented. Emma's self-esteem has improved; although she may have struggled at times, she knows that God loves her. She is a work in progress and will continue working to build her self-esteem.

The follow-up question is, "How did you improve your perception of God?" All of the women said that spiritual formation was the avenue that helped them improve their perception of God as a father. They utilized a variety of spiritual disciplines: prayer, fasting, Bible reading, scripture memorization, and community engagement at church.

#### *Feminist and Womanist Interviews*

The interviews for the seven women with alternative perspectives were one-on-one, via video conferencing, a phone call, and face-to-face. The women were forthcoming when answering the majority of the questions. The interviews lasted for about an hour; one interview lasted for two-and-a-half hours and consisted of fifteen

questions. All fifteen questions fit into five categories: general expectations of a father, relationship with father and their self-esteem, perception of God, relationship with God and self-esteem, and theological beliefs.

From the first category of general expectations of a father, the questions were “What is the role of a father for a daughter?” and “What are the characteristics of a good father?” Most of the women answered the questions with very similar answers to traditional Christian women, to nurture, guide, love, protect, support, direct, be honest, demonstrate masculinity, and set the expectation for future relationships. Allie shared, “The role of a father is to care for her, to be her ultimate keeper, protector, teacher, be strong, provide a model of self-esteem, and model of what a relationship with a spouse should look like.” Justine added, “The characteristics of a good father are to be compassionate, caring, love unconditionally, and cast vision. A good father should be able to cast a vision for his family and illustrate and exemplify the love of Christ.”

From the second category, the women answered questions focusing on their relationship with their father and their self-esteem. The questions consisted of “How has the presence or non-presence of your father affected your self-esteem and self-worth?” and to describe their relationship with their father. Sheryce shared her traumatic story with her father:

My father’s presence and non-presence made a huge, traumatic impact on my life. At ten years old, I suffered from depression because I felt like I was not enough. My father had a major drug addiction, and I felt like it was my fault that I could not keep him off drugs. My self-worth was built on being successful by keeping him out of trouble. When it did not work, I felt like I did not do enough. My relationship with my father is not the traditional father/daughter; he was present for crucial things but not in a parental role. At times, I still find myself being more of a parent in our relationship.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Interviewed on 3/23/19.

Samantha explained her complicated relationship with her father:

I suffered from low self-esteem because of my father's absence. Growing up, my father did not recognize me as his child, so he was not present in my life. I met him once I became an adult. I saw him at a nightclub, and he tried to hit on me. At the time, I do not think he recognized who I was; I told him he was my father. I would try to build a relationship with him, and he would ask me to bring someone he could date with him to his house. Although my relationship with my father was intense, I did have good men in my life, like my Godfather who encouraged me.<sup>13</sup>

Justine responded to the question, "My father helped shape my self-esteem and self-worth. My father always challenged me not to accept the status quo and be a leader instead of following the masses. I had a good father; I knew I was loved by the way my father provided support, guidance, and unconditional love."<sup>14</sup> Deborah shared, "My relationship with my dad is good. He works a lot and lives in another country, so we do not see each other that much. There are times when I feel disconnected since I am so far away. I try not to focus on the distance. Overall, I feel pretty close to my dad. My father empowered me to have high self-esteem."<sup>15</sup> Allie expressed her relationship with her emotionally absent father:

My self-esteem was low growing up. My father was an alcoholic, and I grew up strongly disliking him. He provided financially for our family, but emotionally he was distant. I did not understand my father for years. I was seen as the bad guy, and I did not like that. I finally reached a point where I started focusing on myself, it took a while to rebuild my self-esteem, but I did it. I was able to come to terms with understanding that my father had his issues he was battling.

From the third category of perception of God, the questions were "Do you perceive God as a father," "Describe your view of God," and "How has your relationship

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<sup>13</sup> Interviewed on 3/25/2019.

<sup>14</sup> Interviewed on 3/16/2019.

<sup>15</sup> Interviewed on 3/22/2019.

with your father affected your perception of God as a father?" Justine explained why she does not perceive God as a father:

No. I do not perceive God as a father only. I perceive God as being Father and Mother. God is neither male nor female. As a Spirit, God is unlimited and not defined. I have been blessed to experience the unconditional love of God tangibly through my family. I believe that God is a guide that provides wisdom, insight, and divinely orchestrates our lives. My relationship with my father was very instrumental in my understanding of God's unconditional love.

Allie shares the cause of her perception of God:

I do not perceive God as a father. He is a parent but not a father. For me, it is hard to fathom a loving father that is consistent and loving. There is no way God is a father because of the things men do. God is the creator. Maya Angelou called God "It." I would love to call God it, but because of my denomination, I am unable to do so. I perceive God as being Father God, Mother God, Creator God. God shows up in all forms of what I need. When I talk about God, I use the pronouns "her," "she," "mother-father." My father has ruined my ability to see God as a father. I have had men in my life that have been kind and loving, but I struggle to see God as a father. My father was awful; he was not present. That is why I am a lesbian now; I do not want to end up with one of those men.

Like the previous two responses, Sheryce did not perceive God as a father only:

Scriptures refer to God as being both father and mother. Let us make man; the Trinity cannot create woman without having a piece of her within himself since man was made in the image and likeness of God. Seeing divinity played out not just in masculine ways opened up my understanding of being a woman in ministry, mother, and wife. I cannot accept only referring to God with masculine pronouns. I am becoming more intentional to use feminine pronouns when speaking of God. I have a hard time understanding God as a father because I did not have a healthy connection with my father that wanted to be in my life.

Tina explained her unique perception of God:

I do see God as a father, but I do not prescribe to the traditional perspective. I see God as a creator. The father of the house that directs and orchestrates things. I refer to God as a mystical comforting blanket. God is a teacher that will not give me everything I want and has a sense of humor. To me, God is in all things.<sup>16</sup>

Samantha's reply to the question was:

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<sup>16</sup> Interviewed on 3/28/2019.

God is a genderless spirit. I can see the feminine attributes of God. I do not have a problem accepting the image of God as a father. God is God, and man is man. God was a father to me when I was fatherless. So based on my heart, It manifested itself that way. I do not connect my view of God with my father. Since my father was absent, God made the connection, and I was able to put my father's absence to rest.

Deborah shared a different perspective relative to her perception of God:

I perceive God as a father, healer, protector, and creator. God becomes what I need him to be. I know that I can have a real relationship with him. God is the father of everything. With God, I feel like I am a part of the family. Growing up in a Christian home, I received a solid foundation. My relationship with my father has influenced my perspective of God because God does not physically live in the house like a natural father, but he still provides.

From the fourth category, the women answered questions about their relationship with God and self-esteem. More specifically, "How has your self-esteem and self-worth attributed to your relationship with God," "Describe your relationship with God," and "How has your relationship with God influenced your relationship with your father?"

Sally explained the impacts God had on her self-esteem:

My self-esteem has increased drastically. Once I started reading the Word of God and meditating on scriptures, they began to come alive. I also started going back to church, and my faith grew. God has given me beauty for ashes. Now I am more confident and less ashamed of my past. I am free from the past and trusting God more and more each day. I do not need low self-esteem, I can look up to the hills, and I know that my help comes from God. Daily, God shows me his love and direction. My current relationship with God is more like a mentor/mentee. God tells me when I am right or wrong. God cannot be my friend because friends are unsteady; a mentor is steady. My relationship with God has given me the strength to rebuild my relationship with my father. I know that God is working on his heart, and all is not lost.

Allie shared the process that changed her self-esteem and self-worth:

When I was younger, my relationship with God did not help my self-esteem or self-worth. I thought God was a horrible man that would kill me for the slightest thing. As a teen, I started feeling like God was not a man, and I can talk with God. Nevertheless, I did not know what God was. I decided God was not a man, so now God can help me work through these things. Before going to church, I read all manner of self-help books, but it was not until I went to church that things

started making sense. When that was not making sense, I started using Buddhist practices to explain it more. Years later, my dad and I started going to church together; we went to separate churches. The more I went to church, the more I was willing to have conversations with him and create an adult relationship with him. As I grew in Christ, my relationship with my dad grew and got better. When I did not have a good foundation in Christ, my relationship with my father was tolerable at the least. My current relationship with God is beautiful. I pray every morning. I have a strong faith in the God I created. The God I created is not the traditional God at church, but I have the same fervor I get on a Sunday morning. I love God and love loving God. I could not have the joy I have without God. It is beautiful.

Tina found that attending church improved her self-esteem:

My self-esteem improved when I started attending church. Through the teachings, I learned how to have confidence in myself. I believe I have a better understanding of God. When I hear the pastor's teaching, it resonates with me more instead of going through me. I have been able to find comfort in God. I can talk to my deceased father through God for direction concerning my family. I feel like those things are too small for God.

Justine finds God improved her self-esteem as well:

What has improved was my humility. My self-esteem has not been an issue for me, but in my journey with God, it was vital for me to learn humility. That was an absolute must! I am so grateful to God for allowing me to have a relationship with my father that has shaped and molded my life. The two words that would describe my current relationship with God would be awestruck and wonder. I am filled with excitement and anticipation to see what else God has in store for me. I have stood and watched in amazement what God has already done for me. I have to keep a posture of continued obedience and join in the process of touching lives.

Sheryce believes her relationship with God improved her self-esteem:

My self-esteem has improved with the help of God. I have received healing, restoration, and freedom through pastoral counseling, Christian therapy, intentional naming, and formational prayer. I believe that God was in every session with my counselor, speaking through her guiding me. I no longer believe that I need to earn God's love. I am worth enough to receive God's love freely. I am currently leaning into the safety and security of God, being Alpha and Omega in my life. I know that I am within the will of God, even when I have doubt, frustrations, and uncertainty. I am more intentional about understanding the wholeness of the motherhood of God. My relationship with God has helped me with my relationship with my dad. I found that when I let go of the past and forgave my father, I let go of the hurt, anger, and resentment. He is now attending church, so we pray together and share our faith journeys.

From the fifth category of theological beliefs, three questions were asked, “Are you a womanist or a feminist,” “What are your theological views of patriarchy in the bible and theology,” and “What are some scriptures that support your perspective?”

Deborah identified as a feminist but accepted traditional Christian theology: “I am a feminist, and I am a Christian. I would like to see equality for women in the church.”

Tina shared an interesting response: “The face you give and the face you are will determine how you are defined. I do not define myself. My words will describe which face to bring to the conversation. The face I bring to this conversation may be perceived as feminist. I do not have any particular scriptures that support it. I have not thought about it.”

Sheryce shared her theological perspective as a womanist:

I am a womanist. A womanist sees theology through the lens of a Black woman and highlights the experiences of women and Black women in the Bible. Hagar is an excellent example of a Black Egyptian woman in the Bible who was treated unfairly but also was the only woman ever to give God a name. I believe it is time for equality for women in the Bible and the church. Women played a significant role throughout the Bible, and most are not recognized. Like I stated previously, I see God as father/mother. The scripture that supports my perspective would be Genesis 1:26, which identifies God making both male and female in his image and likeness.

Samantha also identifies as a womanist and shares her thoughts concerning patriarchy:

Yes, I identify as a womanist. The term *womanist* was a term created by Alice Walker. A womanist is a Black woman that wrestles with the interpretation of the Bible as it relates to herself. This perspective allows me to read the Bible from the perspective of an African American woman. We can be who God intended us to be without exploiting our femininity. Patriarchy in theology is frustrating because it is non-inclusive. They are not acknowledging that the Bible is written to both men and women. I still want to see the church give women equality. Some churches are hindering women from fulfilling the call that God placed on their lives because of tradition. I think about different women in the Bible who were in leadership or pushed against the laws of the time that God sided with: Deborah,

Esther, Hagar, and the Daughters of Zelophehad.

Like the two previous responses, Justine identifies as a womanist and shared similar ideas:

I would identify myself as a womanist. A womanist is one who looks at scripture and theology through the lens of a woman's world experiences. Womanist theology is essential; it creates a new perspective. I believe that patriarchy in theology limits the knowledge of self, God, and others. There are scriptures throughout the Bible that demonstrate feminine attributes of God; God being a Spirit, and God being a father to the fatherless and a mother to the motherless. Jesus never oppressed women.

The information gathered from the women with traditional and alternative theological perspectives provided significant insight into their father-daughter relationships, as well as their view of God relative to their experiences. The majority of women involved in the study shared similar stories surrounding their father negatively impacting their self-esteem and positively impacted by God. The majority of women also agree that their distorted views of God came from their damaging encounters with their fathers.

### **Analysis**

The research objective for the online survey and the interviews was to discover if the emotional and physical absence of Black fathers impacts the identity and perception of God within Black Christian women. From the results of the online survey and both interviews, women who had emotionally or physically absent fathers identified that they had low self-esteem and self-worth. The women whose fathers were emotionally present tend to have higher self-esteem and self-worth. The results also indicated that women correlated the attributes of a father to God as a father. From the survey, ninety-two percent of the women perceived God as Father. Of the forty-two women who took the survey, no one selected that they believed God was not a father. In the interviews, the

women who subscribed to the Christian Theological perspective also perceived God as a father. The objection to perceiving God like a father was with the women who had an alternative perspective. Five of the seven women interviewed who identified as either feminist or womanist adamantly denied God as a father.

When asked if their relationship with their father affected their perception of God, most women with father wounds agreed that it had an impact. Women with a traditional Christian theological perspective have a difficult time either embracing God's love or seeing God without a distorted view. Women who identified with womanist theology also agreed that their view of God was distorted by their father's example. The womanists also included their theological perspective as an additional reason they were unable to see God as a father. Also, there is a belief that the patriarchy of Christian theology has distorted the image of God to be solely male-focused instead of gender-neutral. All of the women responded that their relationship with God had improved their self-esteem and self-worth. They also agreed that the avenue used to increase their confidence was spiritual formation. The more they understood and drew closer to God, the better they felt. The majority of women currently have a good relationship with God.

Most women found their relationship with God influenced their ability to forgive or restore fractured relationships with some of their fathers. The findings also indicate that father wounds are voids created in the hearts of Black Christian women. It is also important to mention that these emotional wounds are not limited to race, ethnicity, or gender. Studies reveal that any woman who has a fractured relationship with her father could have a distorted view of God as a father. Therefore, the findings in this thesis can

be informative for any woman suffering from father wounds; and the healing steps are available to any woman experiencing this internal pain.

### **Alternative Perspective**

Women who have experienced traumatic events with their father may seek alternative theological perspectives to remedy their father-wounded heart, stepping entirely away from any perspective that is entirely male-led. Two alternative perspectives highlighted within the research interviews were womanist and feminist theology. Womanist and feminist theology may be a proposed solution to healing their father wounds because of the utilization of gender-neutral language for God and their opposition to patriarchy.<sup>17</sup>

From the beginning of time, society has given men the exclusive rights and responsibilities of governing families and creating cultural norms. With societal structures being formed by men, the need for the affection and approval of a father has become customary in all aspects of life, especially spirituality. When a woman does not receive the desired affection, it can cause different aspects of her identity and perception of God to be distorted. However, these are Christian women do not ascribe to the ideology of the primary God-image as that of a father. Some contest that the societal

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<sup>17</sup> Patriarchy is the “social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line.” *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “Patriarchy,” accessed December 26, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patriarchy>. The most crucial problem of patriarchy is the oppression of women. For centuries, women have received a lesser social status than men, silencing their voices and opinions concerning their rights and responsibilities, leaving women utterly dependent on men to make choices for them. The creation of gender roles gave women the sphere for which they should remain without interfering with male leadership. The misuse of the power and authority given to men has to lead to the abuse of women since no one was assigned to hold men accountable for the fair treatment of the women. However, a more in-depth discussion concerning patriarchy is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

foundations surrounding patriarchy helped create and affirm the Father-God image while dismissing the feminine attributes of God's character.

### **Feminist Theology**

The term *feminism* was first used in France by Hubertina Auclert in 1882 to name the struggle of women to gain political rights.<sup>18</sup> Although the term feminism was given in 1882, women within the United States began speaking out on behalf of their inferior treatment fifty-two years earlier. It was not until the nineteenth century that White US-American women began to experience any relief from the mistreatment:

Due largely to the persistence of Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony, women in the United States won the right to own property. These women paved the way for the success of women's suffrage. Carrie Chapman Catt and many others aided women in getting the right to vote through the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment of the US Constitution in 1920.<sup>19</sup>

After receiving the right to vote, the momentum of feminism dramatically declined until the 1960s when African American women began to protest during the Civil Rights Movement concerning fair treatment and voting rights. During this time, the differentiation between White and Black feminist was realized: "In the late 1970s a new development of feminism arose, one that drew attention to differences in race and social class of women. Historians of feminism now call this one 'third wave' of feminism. It emerged in the United States with 'women of color' taking that name to expose the

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<sup>18</sup> Anne Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 11.

<sup>19</sup> Clifford, 11.

whiteness of the interests of second-wave feminism.”<sup>20</sup> The third wave of feminism focuses on celebrating the diversity of the various ethnic groups of the world.

Ann Clifford, provides a clear definition of feminism, “as a social vision, rooted in women’s experience of sexually-based discrimination and oppression, a movement seeking the liberation of women from all forms of sexism, and an academic method of analysis being used in virtually every discipline.”<sup>21</sup> One of the ways feminism began to seek the liberation of women was to analyze the discipline of Christian theology. Feminist theology focuses on the “neglect of women’s full incorporation into the people of God<sup>22</sup> by focusing on the shortcomings of the ‘maleness’ of Christian theology.”<sup>23</sup> Even with this unique goal, Feminist theology shares one collective commitment to “bring faith in God revealed by Jesus Christ from the perspective of women’s experiences to understanding.”<sup>24</sup> There are three distinctly different types of feminist theology: Revolutionary Feminist Theology, Reformist Feminist Theology, and Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology.

Revolutionary Feminist Theology is affected most by radical feminists, especially those who advocate women-centered culture. These women allowed their own feminist consciousness to lead them to conclude that Christianity is irredeemably patriarchal, even

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<sup>20</sup>Clifford, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 30.

anti-woman.<sup>25</sup> They ultimately believe that women are unable to fully be liberated if they are led by a religion that has its “centrality given to the revelation of a male God, who they believe is used to legitimate the patriarchal oppression of women by church and in their marital relationships.”<sup>26</sup> The women who prescribe to this movement, have turned to Eastern Goddess traditions for their theology.<sup>27</sup>

Reformist Feminist Theology is a modest approach, and is “opposed to gender bias in the treatment of women in their families, churches, and civil societies.”<sup>28</sup> This theological method accepts the standard view of Christian theology as it relates to the Trinity. These women believe, “they can solve the problems of women’s secondary status with measures such as better translations of the Bible and more emphasis on egalitarian passages in the Bible.”<sup>29</sup> The women are going to be found in either Roman Catholic churches or Protestant denominations. They do not want to replace the God revealed by Jesus Christ<sup>30</sup>.

Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology seeks to liberate the core of the Christian tradition by reestablishing the structures of church and the civil society. Like reformist feminist theology, reconstructionists value Christian theology and share a critical appraisal of patriarchy. However, they do not believe permitting women to hold

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<sup>25</sup> Clifford, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

church offices and do church-related ministries is sufficient enough to induce their desired change to reinterpret the traditional symbols and ideas of Christianity without abandoning the God revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>31</sup>

### *Image of God*

The Euro-American feminist perspective of the image of God is best represented as genderless. Anne Clifford, discusses the feminist perspective on God in her book, *Introduction to Feminist Theology*. One of the most significant biblical accounts of the naming of God, for the Euro-American feminist is the burning bush encounter between Moses and God in Exodus 3:13–14. During this conversation, God reveals “YHWH” or “I am (who I am)” as his name. The word *YHWH* is derived from the verb *to be* and not a proper name per se. It is therefore feasible that YHWH could be interpreted to indicate that the God of Israel is either male or female, or encompasses both genders at once.<sup>32</sup> Although, YHWH is a tremendously complex name of God, Elizabeth Johnson, a Catholic feminist theologian, proposes YHWH be translated as “She Who Is” since YHWH transcends the limitations of gender.<sup>33</sup> Johnson reasons, that if Genesis 2 is considered, the feminist translation is accurate since YHWH is depicted as a divine relational being who gives life to the world as a “pure aliveness.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Clifford, 33–34.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mercy of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, Crossroad, 1992), 240.

Other Old Testament designations for God that feminists hold are creator, liberator, and covenant maker. As feminists seek to continue to bring equality to the personified perspectives of the images of God, two feminine-gendered nouns *Hokmah* and *Sophia*—“Wisdom” in Hebrew and Greek, respectively—are gaining increased attention as an essential personification for God.<sup>35</sup> The significance of Wisdom being identified as the female presence of God, helps in the creation narrative found within wisdom literature.<sup>36</sup> *Shekinah* is another feminine personification of God’s presence that means “to dwell.”<sup>37</sup> Shekinah was the divine representation of God recognized by the Israelites when they were being guided out of Egypt as a cloud by day and fire by night. Moreover, it was also known as the Spirit among us on the earth.

Most feminists who are vehemently opposed to the masculinization of God within Christian theology, do not subscribe to the traditional symbolism of Father-God because of the rationalized dehumanization of woman and justified patriarchy within and outside of Christian churches.<sup>38</sup> Some feminists who forsake Christianity may turn to traditions that worship female deities. Mary Daly, shares a similar sentiment in *Sexist Religion and Women in the Church*.<sup>39</sup> She describes the revolution and revelation women need to embrace in order to be free of the male-centered ideologies housed within the patriarchal

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<sup>35</sup> Clifford, 105.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Regina Coll, *Christianity and Feminism in Conversation* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications), 37.

<sup>38</sup> Coll, 93.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Daly, “Theology After The Demise of God The Father: A Call for the Castration of Sexist Religion,” in *Sexist Religion and Women In The Church: No More Silence!*, ed. Alice L. Hageman (New York: Association Press, 1974), 125–42.

religion of Christianity. Using women's liberation as the foundation, Daly provides three reasons why theology is oppressive to women: by proclaiming women's subordination as God's will, exclusively using God masculine symbols for God, and its detachment from reality and human struggle with oppression. Daly goes on to describe an essential method for emasculating the pseudo-generic man, on top of unfolding God, the fall, and the need for a male savior. She calls for the replacement for the God-Father of the patriarchal society to an inward foremother found in women through the healing process which invokes her authentic self.

Feminists who remain in Christianity but do not support the masculine God identity suggest that

The best solution for resolving the God-language problem is to use gender-neutral (nonsexist) language for God. But the use of "God" as if it were a gender-neutral name can be tedious and does not actually challenge the prevailing belief that God is male... At best gender-neutral language avoids giving offense to those who object to male-only God language.<sup>40</sup>

When feminine God language is highlighted it allows for a more well balanced presentation of God to be shown.

### **Womanist Theology**

In 1983, Alice Walker, a known poet and activist, introduced the word *womanist* in her book, *In the Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. She defines a womanist as "a black feminist or feminist of color." The term *womanist* comes from the Black cultural understanding of "womanish," which is the opposite of "girlish," frivolous, irresponsible,

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<sup>40</sup> Clifford, 96.

or lacking of seriousness.<sup>41</sup> Stephanie Mitchem, in her book, *Introducing Womanist Theology* cites that

Walker captures the holistic way that black women embrace diversity, within self and others, in one of the most lyrical sections of the definition “Loves the Spirit. Loves, love, and food and roundness. Loves struggle.” Walker’s words become the conduit for expression of what it means for black women to be women. Walker’s definition is powerful, gathering components of black women’s lives in order to define what feminism means to them.<sup>42</sup>

The term *womanist* provides an identity that encompasses the unique experiences of Black women<sup>43</sup> and highlights the realities faced in history, culture, and religion. With this enlightenment, African American women theologians and scholars established womanist theology, which shifts perspectives and forces people out of their comfort zone.<sup>44</sup>

Stephanie Mitchem explains the various aspects of womanist theology that questions societal norms:

Womanist theology starts with analysis of roles assigned to African American women by their families and the dominant culture, the persistent stereotypes about black women, the combination of race with gender, and recognition of diversity among women. For black women to do this analysis is, in itself, empowering as we discover truths about ourselves. The skill of naming personal truths is drawn from black women’s networking traditions and is part of womanist theology.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher and Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother: Womanist and Xodus God-Talk* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 3.

<sup>42</sup> Stephanie Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 55.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Mitchem, 23.

The theological constructs of womanist theology aim to answer the questions, “Where is God in the lives of African American women?” and “How do Black women name God?”<sup>46</sup> To effectively answer these questions, the evaluation of the doctrinal and ecclesial constructions in the lives of Black women needs to be interpreted and reestablished.<sup>47</sup>

Ethics is another foundational aspect of womanist theology, which is derived from the reflection of the lived experiences of women. Hermeneutics is the remaining component that helps construct the theological framework of womanist theology:

An important aspect of the development of womanist theology is often unstated: black women are not primarily focused on addressing the concerns of white theologians. Instead, African American women address the concerns of their lives from their own perspectives.<sup>48</sup>

### *Image of God*

With the foundation of womanist theology being taken from the life experiences of Black women, history, and literature a plethora of names for God has emerged. Womanist theologians have described God as a God of liberation, a God of survival, and a God of resistance against evil.<sup>49</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher in her book *My Sister, My Brother: Womanist and Xodus God-Talk* describes God as a male and female Spirit that manifests to Black women as strength of life and empowering. Within the context of God as a Spirit, Baker-Fletcher introduces the male and female God image by citing Genesis

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>49</sup> Baker-Fletcher and Baker-Fletcher, 25.

1:27: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them”:

If we, male and female, are created in God’s image, then it is possible to image God as male and female... There is something within Black culture that recognizes the holistic nature of God, which identifies with humanity in its fullness as male and female. Such recognition resonates with the first creation account of humanity in Genesis. Such understanding must be lifted up without shame. To be ashamed of it, is to be ashamed of the fullness of God and of women created in the likeness of God. If that likeness of God is within us, in each gender, surely we can find God in ourselves, realizing empowerment and our full potential as we learn to love God and ourselves.<sup>50</sup>

Not embracing the female God image as a woman could create a disconnection to the concept of being created in God’s image.

The representation of God as strength of life is found in creation as well as daily dependence on God for “strength to carry vision, and salvation through the transformation of life as it is to life as it should be.”<sup>51</sup> Womanists use Psalm 27 to represent the hope and presence of God in the lives of humanity by highlighting God’s presence in human history as a light and social transformation by the empowering Spirit, while connecting with God through creation. Fletcher shares the purpose of womanist theology in reference to God as Strength:

The task for womanist theology of survival, liberation, and wholeness is to address the brokenness of all of creation in a holistic manner, ministering to body, mind, spirit, and the material world. An adequate theology is one that remembers God who is the strength of all life, who keeps humankind in harmony with the sacred in our everyday work, and works for the healing and wholeness of creation.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>52</sup> Baker-Fletcher and Baker-Fletcher, 30.

For most womanists, God is strength can be reflected in the lives of Black men and women through survival. The revelation may take form through a variety of theological perspectives or non-religious spirituality.<sup>53</sup>

The presentation of God as Empowering Spirit is manifested through the hope given to Black women that “transcends fear, creating visions of promise and resources for survival, for resistance against evil, for liberation, and for healing.”<sup>54</sup> Womanists’ affirm, the empowering Spirit of God is housed within the Trinity: “God is Spirit. Jesus is Spirit and human. The Spirit is the all-encompassing, inclusive force in which God/creator, Jesus, and all of creation are inextricably enwombed.”<sup>55</sup> Although womanist theology embraces the Trinity, it is not in the sense of traditional Christian theology that embraces God as Father, Jesus as Son, and Holy Spirit. Womanists believe that God is an all-encompassing Spirit by citing John 4:24: “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” Womanist theology has placed the term “Spirit” into their God-talk. It represents more than an emotive or passive experience. It is a symbol of God that supersedes humanity’s limited and finite understanding and refers to the actual and true God. That involves head and heart, reason and feelings.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>56</sup> Baker-Fletcher and Baker-Fletcher, 35.

## Proposed Solutions

Although womanist and feminist theologies are proposed solutions to healing father wounds, they may not offer the most effective solution. Based on these perspectives, the wounds created by a father would not adequately heal since the women are not willing to embrace the father aspect. Even though womanist theology highlights God as Mother/Father, the more dominant image of God is a woman. Focusing solely on the female or gender-neutral attributes negates the fatherhood of God layer within the divinity that provides the best example of what a father should be.

Womanists site John 4:24<sup>57</sup> to highlight the gender-neutrality of God and Genesis 1:26<sup>58</sup> to introduce the feminine attributes of God. Since God is a spirit, and created male and female in his image, accepting the fatherly attributes of God can rewrite the distorted view of God given by dysfunctional relationships with fathers. From the womanist and feminist interviews found in the research, all of the women stated that the role of a father is to give love, support, guidance, protection, education, and self-esteem. However, their theological interpretation of God as Spirit does not include any of these attributes, leaving the women to self-reliance and independence.

Revolutionary Feminist Theology, like womanist theology, would not be useful for healing father wounds in women within the Black church because it encourages women to cast aside Christianity because of the oppressive patriarchal perspectives. Most

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<sup>57</sup> John 4:24: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

<sup>58</sup> Genesis 1:26: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."

women who support this ideology have turned to ancient goddess traditions for their theology.<sup>59</sup> Revolutionary Feminist theology does not provide a solution for restoring the distorted view of God created through disappointment and abandonment of the father nor does it encourage women to continue engaging the God of Christianity. Moreover, Black women who attend church would have a hard time embracing this perspective because they are not accustomed to calling upon God using feminine pronouns.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight the research methodology used to identify the impact father wounds have on Black Christian women's identity and perception of God as a father. The research supported that women with fathers who were emotionally or physically absent were wounded, creating a distorted view of God while suffering from low self-esteem and self-worth. The women who had emotionally present fathers did not suffer from low self-esteem or father wounds. Womanist and feminist theologies were proposed as alternative solutions for healing father wounds. However, after further review, those theological perspectives did not apply to most Black Christian women. The next chapter outlines the proposed method for healing father wounds within Black Christian women from the Christian theological perspective.

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<sup>59</sup> Clifford, 33.

## CHAPTER 5: THESIS

African American women make up the majority of the Black church. With this unyielding dedication to faith, it is essential to rectify any issues that may hinder women from possessing an accurate perception of the father God-image. This thesis will assist Black Christian women in rewriting their identity narrative and reconciling an authentic perception of God that has been distorted by father wounds. The proposed methodology needed to accomplish this objective is a four-part process designed to explore the method of healing father wounds: discovering the root of the father wound; renouncing the former mindset surrounding a distorted view of self, God, and their father; practical steps for embracing God's fatherly love; and the benefits of living with a healed heart. The intended outcome of this study is to provide healing and freedom to Black women whose perception of God and self, has been distorted by father wounds so that the women can experience respect, protection, and acceptance. In addition, this study shows how to equip ministry leaders with practical support to shepherd women with this trauma.

### **Discovering the Father Wound**

The emotional or physical absence of fathers within Black Christian families creates father wounds affecting Black Christian women's identity and perception of God as a father. To effectively identify father wounds within women, an option would be to evaluate her personality type, relationship with their father, and perception of God through a detailed survey.

Survey questions 1–5 focus on the father-daughter relationship.<sup>1</sup> These questions allow women the freedom to describe how they perceive their fathers’ presence or non-presence in their lives. The questions also reveal the psychological framework that molded the expectations of future experiences with men, her ability to communicate and relate to others, and her self-image. Questions 6–8 identify the emotional development, personality type, and relational abilities that have resulted from her father’s presence. Survey questions 9–15 show the correlation between the wounds created within the father-daughter relationship to her perception of the Father God image. The significance of these questions assists women to acknowledge the unspoken pain they have endured relative to their relationship with their fathers.

As women begin to acknowledge their pain and grieve their losses, a variety of emotions may transpire within them. Women experiencing pain may want to focus on the immediate relief of their emotional pain instead of the process of healing. It is imperative to create an environment that allows women to feel comfortable and safe enough to process their emotions fully. As ministry leaders shepherd women through grief, the focus should be on their broken heart and not a wounded brain. In *Shepherding Women in Pain*, Dr. Bev Hislop states: “Too often well-meaning people or ill-prepared shepherds may hinder this process by giving women in pain comments that may be intellectually accurate but do not bring healing to a broken heart.”<sup>2</sup> The goal of the shepherd is to direct

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for details.

<sup>2</sup> Bev Hislop, *Shepherding Women in Pain: Real Women, Real Issues, and What You Need to Know to Truly Help* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishing, 2010), chap. 1, par. 15, Kindle.

women back to Christ by inviting him into the process of healing, so women are aware that God is present amid their transformation.

### **Renouncing the Former Mindset**

Admitting the pain is the first step in renouncing the former mindset held by a woman with father wounds. Confessing painful experiences permits women to recognize how the unspoken hurt has shaped their personality, mindset, and their perception of God. Admission allows for the removal of the walls erected to protect from disappointment and vulnerability. Admitting pain also releases women from self-imposed expectations that result from a distorted view of self.

The narrative of a woman with the issue of blood found in Mark 5:25–34 and Luke 8:43–48 is an example of a woman admitting her pain to Christ. This unnamed woman experienced a painful ailment in her body for over twelve years. She used all of her money in hopes of experiencing healing; unfortunately, her condition grew worse. Desperate for a change, she admitted to herself the only way to experience transformation will be to touch the border of Jesus' garment. After successfully touching Jesus' garment and receiving her healing, she took another courageous step and admitted to Jesus what she had done. Although she was afraid, she admitted her truth in front of Jesus and others, resulting in her physical healing and admonished blessing over her life.

In the book *Rejected to Accepted: Learning to Love Myself After Adversity*,<sup>3</sup> the author shares a four-part exercise designed to identify the underlying beliefs developed in

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<sup>3</sup> LaSondra Barnes, *Rejected to Accepted: Learning to Love Myself After Adversity* (Meadville, PA: Christian Faith Publishing, 2019), 52.

one's heart influenced by father wounds. The exercise also offers women the necessary tools needed for rewriting their identity narrative. The first part of the exercise is finding the lie. The process for discovering the lie is similar to the method used for "Admitting the Pain" section. The wounded woman is to identify the character, physical, and emotional traits that she dislikes about herself. The traits identified are classified as negative attributes or lies.

The author categorizes negative attributes as "lies" because the attributes developed from damaging circumstances in life: "Past pains have a way of shaping the perspective and behaviors we tolerate in our lives. Just because a negative experience happened, it does not qualify as truth in life."<sup>4</sup> The negative statements wounded women tend to believe about themselves are not from God but the enemy: "Lies from the enemy directly oppose the truths of God,"<sup>5</sup> which cause distorted views of self. By identifying the lies within their lives, wounded women will be aware of the tactics of the devil.

The second portion of the exercise uncovers the fears that are associated with the lies they believe about themselves. The purpose of fear within this context reinforces the lie that the wounded woman believes about herself from her personal experiences. The fears also correspond to the symptoms of the Fatherless Woman Syndrome discussed in chapter one. By exposing their fears, wounded women allow God to free them from the captivity of wrong thinking. 2 Timothy 1:7 states, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind." In *Rejected to Accepted*, the author, who refers to herself as a fatherless daughter, shared her beliefs surrounding the lies and fears

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 53.

she harbored in her life. The lie she believed about herself was that she was unloved. The fear associated with her lie was that she would never get married and experience a healthy relationship with a man.<sup>6</sup> The misleading perspective fueled by lies and fear hindered the author's ability to experience her relational desires because of the low self-esteem inflicted by her father wounds.

Shame is the third portion of the exercise that needs to be acknowledged. Dr. Mary Lamia describes shame “as a self-conscious emotion, shame informs us of an internal state of inadequacy, unworthiness, dishonor, regret, or disconnection.”<sup>7</sup> Specific events or circumstances can cause wounded women to feel unworthy, guilty, or inadequate internally. Shame can cause wounded women to create a mask of perfection to hide behind in hopes of disguising their internal pain. 1 John 1:9 reminds believers that “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” By pinpointing the shame in one’s life, the women will be free from the enemies’ plan to hinder and destroy their lives.

The last portion of the exercise helps women identify the truth of who they are in the sight of God. The purpose of this portion is to contrast the negative perspective gained from the lies, fear, and shame sections and write a new God-given narrative. The Bible offers a vast number of scriptures that build confidence, provide assurance, and bring healing to all aspects of life. Hebrew 4:12 states, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul

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<sup>6</sup> Barnes, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Mary C. Lamia, “Shame: A Concealed, Contagious, and Dangerous Emotion,” *Psychology Today*, April 4, 2011, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/201104/shame-concealed-contagious-and-dangerous-emotion>.

and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Rehearsing the affirmations found in the scripture below will restore the confidence and self-esteem of the women. Some examples of truth-affirming scriptures are: “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”<sup>8</sup> “I am a chosen and valuable treasure.”<sup>9</sup> “I belong to God.”<sup>10</sup> “He knows and calls me by my name.”<sup>11</sup> “God validates me, I matter to Him.”<sup>12</sup> The goal of this exercise was to assist women in writing a new God-given identity narrative by naming the factors that established their distorted view of self, using the information from the lies, fear, shame, and truth exercise.

### *Forgiveness*

The act of forgiveness can be a difficult task for wounded daughters, especially if she has anger towards her father. The anger gives the wounded woman a sense of control in a situation wherein she has felt powerless. Some women believe that their anger is a form of punishment for their father’s behavior. However, “those suffering from father wounds have to forgive their fathers to find the freedom and healing they so desperately crave.”<sup>13</sup> Forgiveness is for the wounded person more than the injurer. Forgiveness does not mean the father is off the hook for causing pain. Instead, it releases the power of the

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<sup>8</sup> Psalm 139:13–14.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter 2:9.

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 19:5.

<sup>11</sup> Isa. 43:1.

<sup>12</sup> John 15:16.

<sup>13</sup> Mark E. Strong, *Church for the Fatherless: A Ministry Model for Society’s Most Pressing Problem* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 150.

pain over the wounded person. Forgiveness does not minimize the injury experienced; it is a matter that requires attention in order to move forward. Forgiveness is “a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they deserve your forgiveness.”<sup>14</sup>

Forgiveness does not require the wounded person to forget about the circumstances that occurred. They have the liberty to establish healthy boundaries with that individual. A massive misconception of wounded women surrounding forgiveness is that forgiveness can be done by themselves. Since most offenses happened within a relationship, the healing may occur not with the fault causing person but with a trusted shepherd.<sup>15</sup> Forgiveness also requires wisdom and God’s help. Women may utilize prayer, guidance, and wise counsel of the Holy Spirit to receive the best options to give forgiveness. Forgiveness also requires that the wounded woman forgive herself. The benefits of personal forgiveness release the woman from any guilt, shame, blame, or condemnation that surrounds her wounded heart. The process of forgiveness is not a one-time experience. The action of forgiveness may occur multiple times while navigating through the complexities of healing father wounds.

### *Forgiveness Letter*

The process of forgiveness can commence either face-to-face or in written form. For women who are unable to speak directly to their father for whatever reason, writing a

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<sup>14</sup> “Forgiveness Definition. What Is Forgiveness?” *Greater Good Berkley Magazine*, accessed October 22, 2019, <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/forgiveness/definition>.

<sup>15</sup> Bev Hislop, *Shepherding Women in Pain: Real Women, Real Issues, and What You Need to Know to Truly Help* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishing, 2010), chap. 2, par. 8, Kindle.

letter will provide the same level of freedom as speaking face-to-face. Women who would like to share this with their fathers, writing the letter grants them the freedom to express their thoughts clearly.

The letter can begin by identifying the pain<sup>16</sup> experienced by women, confessing what happened to them. The wounded women share the dimensions of the wound, how it shaped their lives, the length of time, the cause, and possible consequences. Next, they must take ownership of their wounds and not justify them. The women will identify who hurt them and what moral rule he broke. Blaming the injurer<sup>17</sup> allows women to shift the blame from themselves and place the blame where it belongs. Next, they will have to decide to forgive their father formally. The decision to forgive their father helps women realize they can make choices, which will help some regain the confidence she lost in the offense. Once the woman decides to forgive, she cuts the bond that has held her to her father's hurtful decisions. At the end of the letter, she will have to decide how she wants to move forward. Below is an example of a forgiveness letter written from a fatherless daughter to her father:

Dad,

Your inconsistency in my life hurt me deeply. For years, I have felt unloved, unwanted, abandoned by you. All I have ever wanted from you was your love, acceptance, and validation. I thought that I had to prove that I was enough to gain your time and attention. I always told you about my accomplishments to show you that I was a "good kid," hoping you want to spend time with me. I would hang on to your every word because you were my dad. I would get so excited when you made plans to be with me but would be devastated when you would not show up. Dad, I just wanted you to LOVE ME. I wanted you to choose me instead of drugs and alcohol.

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<sup>16</sup> Hislop, *Shepherding Women in Pain*, chap. 2, par. 20, Kindle.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

I looked for your love, validation, and acceptance in men. Every boy I dated, I placed them in your position in my life. I allowed myself to be abused by a man, trying to prove that a man could love me. I confused love with lust and gave myself to men, hoping they would love me back. Of course, none of those relationships worked, and those breakups made me feel abandoned.

When you came back into my life before you died, I was overjoyed. You were able to fill the voids that were there from childhood. However, you died, and those wounds reopened. Now that you are gone, I know there is nothing you can do about it.

Dad, I want you to know that I forgive you. Now that I am an adult, I understand that you loved me the best way you could, and the choices you made in life had nothing to do with me. I let go of all of the anger, bitterness, sadness, and narrative that I have attached to you. I no longer hold you responsible for the decisions that I make in life. I want you to rest peacefully in heaven. Dad, I love you, and miss you!<sup>18</sup>

### **Embracing God’s Fatherly Love**

The third segment of the proposed methodology for healing the father wound is embracing God’s fatherly love. The goal of this section is to encourage women to disconnect their distorted view of the Father God-image founded on their personal experiences with their father and embrace the unconditional love offered by God. An exploration into five character traits possessed by God that identify him as loving, present, and reliable helps to rewrite the distorted narrative.

In *Your Parents and You*, Jim Craddock provides a reason why a person’s concept of God can become distorted: “We have not based our concepts on God the Father entirely on the inspired Word of God; all of us have faulty views of God as Father. Our concepts based on the relationships we have had with our earthly father and other

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<sup>18</sup> Barnes, 39–40.

authority figures.”<sup>19</sup> Since the women’s concept of God has been contrary to the biblical narrative, it is important to open with a clear understanding of the character of God. The most exceptional description of God found within scripture is that he is love. 1 John 4:16 states, “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him.” The kind of love that God exhibits is unconditional; it is a spiritual sense of love. In the Greek language, this type of love is *αγαπη* or *agape*: “Agape love is an unconditional love affection that desires only the good of the person. It has a consuming passion for the well-being of others. Agape love delights in the giving and keeping of consistent affection regardless of what the other person is doing.”<sup>20</sup> Agape love is significant because it goes beyond human emotions and feelings, focusing on the choice and will of promise.

John 3:16 exemplifies God’s unconditional love: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” When Jesus died on the cross, he was performing an act of redemption. God displayed His love by sparing the lives of humanity and allowed Jesus “who gave Himself a ransom for all”<sup>21</sup> to stand in place as a payment of penalty and to cleanse humanity of sin. Jesus, stepping in as a ransom, points to the high price and power of His sacrifice. Through this action, Jesus was bringing the entire world out of the bondage of

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<sup>19</sup> Robert S. McGee, Pat Springle, and Jim Craddock, *Your Parents and You: How Our Parents Shape Our Self Concept, Our Perception of God, and Our Relationships with Others*, rev. ed. (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), 81.

<sup>20</sup> Barnes, 36.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Timothy 2:6.

sin and into freedom. Through the redemptive work of Jesus, he has redeemed humanity from sin, condemnation, the sanction of the law, principalities, and powers.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4–8a (NASB), Paul describes what love is and is not:

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

The Greek term for love used in this passage is the same *agape* used in John 3:16 and to define God as love in 1 John 4:16 and. In Jeremiah 31:3 (NASB), God declares to Israel that the love garnered towards them is unconditional and everlasting. His love consistently draws Israel toward him: “The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have drawn you with loving-kindness.’” The sentiments of this passage are valid for women who are healing their father wound. God loves them with an everlasting love, as well. The image of God presented in these passages describes a God that desires a loving relationship with humanity. When women begin to embrace God’s love, they are exposing themselves to an unconditional love that will never leave or abandon them. The *agape* love of God assures that once embraced; nothing can separate them from God’s love.

God is a present father in the lives of believers through Jesus Christ. In John 14:8–11, Jesus engages in a conversation with the disciples explaining how God the Father is revealed in Christ. Philip asks Jesus to show them the father, and Jesus responded, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe

me for the sake of the works themselves.” Not only is God present through Jesus Christ, but he also dwells within the believer. In Galatians 3:20 Paul states, “I have been crucified with Christ: it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Reliability is a notable character trait of God. In Deuteronomy 7:9, Moses highlights God’s mercy, faithfulness, and promises to the children of Israel: “Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments.” Psalm 145:18 encourages people to call on the Lord in truth, and he will be near to them: “The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.” 2 Thessalonians 3:33 shows God’s reliability through his provisions of strength and protection: “But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.” Psalm 55:22 (AMP) states, “Cast your burden on the Lord [release it], and He will sustain and uphold you; he will never allow the righteous to be shaken (slip, fall, fail). Even through tough times, God promises to uphold the righteous so they will not fail.” 1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds believers of God’s reliability by providing an escape plan in tempting circumstances: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” God, as a reliable father, accepts the responsibility of providing stability and a consistent involved presence that discerns and develops the hearts and minds of his children.

The idea of God being a father has caused contempt in father-wounded women because of the example their fathers demonstrated through their words, actions, presence, or non-presence. Fathers are to establish the identity, self-esteem, purpose, and self-worth within their daughters. Without receiving the fundamental needs, daughters left with feeling abandoned, betrayed, and disappointed. Sadly, these feelings surrounding their earthly father distort their view of God the father. When most wounded women begin to engage their faith, they may be apprehensive about the father God-image. Dr. Matthew Stevenson, in his book *Abba*, describes the restrictions father wounds create in one's view of God:

You will be OK with God as a Creator because that matches your experience of a natural father who was interested only in creating his children and not caring for them. You may be OK with God as a gift giver if your natural father was present only at birthday; you can accept a God who blesses you without conditions and does not require you to follow his standards and instructions. Maybe your dad was present but a distant authoritarian. Thus, you are OK with God as a redeemer of your soul; you view Him as an overbearing dictator who is always looking for a chance to punish you when you mess up. Even though these ideas might be easier to accept, accepting God as Father can be hard if your father betrayed you. These ideas of your natural father are stopping you from receiving the revelation of God as father in your heart. It is stopping you because you feel that your natural father was unfixable, unredeemable, unlovable, or unfit.<sup>22</sup>

Drawing conclusions about God from earthly examples hinders one's ability to experience the true identity of God because of the projections of others onto the image of God. John Craddock states,

No matter how well or how poorly our fathers modeled the character of God, we can be convinced of our heavenly Father's love and power. Certainly, it is to our advantage to have had good models in our parents, but for those of us who didn't,

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew Stevenson, *Abba: Experience God as Father, and Redeem Your Failure, Hurt, and Pain* (Mary Lake, FL: Charisma House, 2017), 25.

we have clear and strong teaching of God's Word, the working of God's Spirit, and the encouragement of God's people to help us understand His nature.<sup>23</sup>

Although God may have the title of Father, he is not their earthly father. Wounded women may struggle with this because of the distorted view from their father. Numbers 23:19 declares, "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" It is imperative to forsake the idea and notion that God will be similar to any human being encountered in life because he is God.<sup>24</sup>

Having a distorted view of God can also be a tactic of the enemy to keep women from experiencing an authentic relationship with God. Satan comes to steal a woman's perception of God by using the harmful father images depicted by earthly fathers. Then killing her identity, purpose, and ability to trust others by the disappointments of the father. Ultimately destroying her desire for a relationship with God because of the distorted father image projected on to God. The weapons needed to fight against the enemies' plan and regain the right perspective are not physical but spiritual. 2 Corinthians 10:4–6 says, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled."

Jesus demonstrates the process of bringing the lies of the enemy captive. While in the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by the devil to turn stones into bread, leap off of a

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<sup>23</sup> McGee, Springle, and Craddock, 86.

<sup>24</sup> Stevenson, 17.

building, and bow down and worship Satan. Each time the devil offered Jesus a distorted view, Jesus firmly declined by using the word of God to declare the truth. When a woman chooses to embrace God's fatherly love, she casts down the strongholds that her father wounds have erected, causing the contrary opinion of God. A useful practice for releasing the false perspective of God's fatherly attributes created by father wounds is to write down scriptures that speak of the authentic character of God.

### **Living with a Healed Heart**

As women arrive in the last section of healing the father wounds process, they officially transition from being a fatherless daughter to a daughter of God. As a daughter of God, the women are encouraged to live in the liberty and freedom offered to them through the Spirit of adoption: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *she* is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"<sup>25</sup> (*emphasis added*). As a daughter of God, women receive a healthy perspective surrounding their identity, purpose, and love since their identity narrative is united with God's identity. In order to maintain their new life as a daughter of God, women can pursue a relationship with God, leaning into the father-daughter aspect. The father-daughter aspect allows women to experience the protection, provision, comfort, healing, peace, and consistency of God. Pursuing a new relationship with God requires consistent communication.<sup>26</sup>

Communication is a factor that creates stability and builds trust in relationships. As the Son of God, Jesus demonstrates the intentionality needed to have consistent

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<sup>25</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17.

<sup>26</sup> Stevenson, 29.

communication with God the Father. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus made time to go away and pray to commune with God as well as receive direction relative to completing his purpose on Earth. While seeing Jesus' consistent prayer life, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. In Matthew 6:5–15, Jesus outlines the model of prayer. The prayer in verses 9–13 is known as the Lord's Prayer:

In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Consistent communication also empowers women to ask questions and seek clarity from God: “There are no questions that are off-limits to God. We can ask His thoughts about us, and we can ask Abba about His plans for us, others, or even our city and nation.”<sup>27</sup> In Matthew 7:7–11, Jesus encourages believers to ask questions:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

The more women practice consistent communication, the easier it will be to release their worries to the Lord. Daughters of God are not required to carry the weight of their concerns, fears, doubts, or circumstances. Jesus offers reassurance in Matthew 6:25–33 to seek God and his kingdom first before worrying over life's circumstances, and God will provide all needs. As women cast their cares on God, they can experience his security to know that in their distress, God hears their cries. Even during temptation, God

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<sup>27</sup> Stevenson, 33.

provides his daughters with authority to bring the negative thoughts of the captive by rehearsing the truths of God's word. Philippians 4:8 (AMP) presents a guide for the kind of thoughts to rehearse during times of temptation:

Finally, believers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable and worthy of respect, whatever is right and confirmed by God's word, whatever is pure and wholesome, whatever is lovely and brings peace, whatever is admirable and of good repute; if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think continually on these things [center your mind on them, and implant them in your heart].

When the negative thought comes to mind, women can utilize the truth statements from the exercises in the previous sections to bring their thoughts under subjection and remind themselves of their identity in Christ.

In order to keep a renewed mindset, the armor of God is essential. The armor of God is composed of seven parts: the belt of truth, the shield of faith, breastplate of righteousness, helmet of salvation, shoes of peace, the sword of the spirit, and prayer. In Ephesians 6:10–18 (NASB), Paul uses the armor of God to explain their purpose relative to the fighting against Satan's lies and tactics of deception:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.

The protection offered through the armor of God provides relief for women who have felt unprotected; these women are no longer required to defend themselves but can

rest in the protection of God. The schemes, devices, and deceits mentioned in the scriptures are the negative thoughts, insecurities, rejection, and humiliation used by the enemy to tempt the women. The amplified Bible provides practical explanations for the specific pieces of the armor of God. The belt of truth is personal integrity and moral courage. The breastplate of righteousness is an upright heart. The shoes of peace are firm-footed stability and the readiness produced by the good news. The shield of faith is covered protection. The helmet of salvation is knowledge of God's salvation and love for you. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.

Living with a healed heart offers the opportunity for daughters of God to engage life with purpose and intentionality. The women can move forward from being stuck emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically. Their outlook on life will come through the lens of being an adult.<sup>28</sup> For most fatherless daughters, their perspective of life has been through the lens of a child.<sup>29</sup> Healing father wounds, empowers women to release the anger they held against their father for not being the man they needed. Seeing life through adult eyes, women can place their relationship with their father into a proper perspective. Women can separate their father's shortcomings from their self-esteem and self-worth. His absence or inconsistency was not the cause of their behavior; it had to do with his own selfish decisions. The separation of emotional responsibility for their father's actions permits women to give and receive love from themselves, others, and God from the right place.

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<sup>28</sup> Jonetta R. Barras, *Whatever Happened to Daddy's Little Girl? The Impact of Fatherlessness on Black Women* (New York: Random House, 2000), 239.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

With this new perspective, women can take responsibility for their actions and change behavior patterns.<sup>30</sup> They can no longer blame their actions on their father. As the author of *Rejected to Accepted* began to heal from her father wounds, she took ownership of her actions. She states, “I knew it was time to choose to forgive my father and let him rest. I could no longer blame him for my actions. I had to let him go. I also had to let go of the story that I used, to blame and hold him responsible for every choice that I made.”<sup>31</sup> Jonetta Barras informs women who are healing their father wound, “You have been hurt; you are in pain, but sleeping with ‘two hundred partners’ won’t make it better. Nor will running away from love guarantee a life without further anguish. In fact, anti-intimate behaviors increase the likelihood that the opposite will occur.”<sup>32</sup> Taking responsibility encourages women to decipher between childhood trauma and poor personal choices. The women can decide how they want to improve their lives instead of expecting someone else to do that for them. The newly created behavior patterns will help women transition mentally from being a victim to victor.

The self-esteem and confidence of women living with a healed heart increases so they can look in the mirror and genuinely love the reflection of the person on the other side. By rehearsing the positive affirmations garnered from the “Renouncing the Former Mindset” section, the women will believe they are enough, loved, wanted, and capable of living a purpose-filled life. They are no longer victims but victorious. Through Christ,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>31</sup> Barnes, 39.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

they have the strength to dream again and fulfill their desired goals. Some women may recreate themselves<sup>33</sup> by living freely, putting her needs before others, becoming fearless, and being happy. With this newfound optimism, the women will no longer assume the worst about themselves or others but expect the best.

Embracing a new confident attitude will help women to learn how to trust and love again. After properly grieving the loss of their father and the fantasy relationship they wanted, daughters of God will be able to move forward, accepting God's fatherly love, allowing God to replace their wounded-heart with a healed one. The spiritual formation options presented throughout this chapter teaches women to lean into their relationship with God to learn how to love and trust healthily. Proverbs 3:5–6 (AMP) encourages believers to, "Trust in and rely confidently on the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight or understanding. In all your ways, know and acknowledge and recognize Him, and He will make your paths straight and smooth [removing obstacles that block your way]."

Daughters of God also benefit from living with a healed heart by becoming more vulnerable and welcoming. Most fatherless daughters were unable to receive the protection they desired from their father, leaving them to depend on themselves for strength and protection, which causes wounded women to lean more into their challenging side than their softer more vulnerable side. Jonetta Barras offers advice to women needing to reclaim their feminine self:

Reconnecting to yourself offers an opportunity to discover what you have done to separate you from the parts of yourself as a woman. The realization that the masculine had taken control over my internal house was the beginning of reclaiming myself. Reconciling myself returning to my feminine energy, gaining a

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<sup>33</sup> Barras, 243.

sense of confidence about it, and its enormous powers permits fatherless women like me to view their male counterparts in a different light. The definition of the masculine comes into clearer, sharper focus. It creates for the fatherless daughter an occasion to reduce the tension between herself and her male partner.<sup>34</sup>

Leaning into more of the welcoming self increases her vulnerability. Being vulnerable offers daughters of God an opportunity to accept their flaws and share their authentic selves with others. Leaning into vulnerability is another way of releasing the shame of the past that once held women hostage.

After experiencing a new life as a daughter of God, women may want to reconnect with their father and create a new relationship with healthy boundaries. If reconnection with their father is not possible, some may want to choose a surrogate father.<sup>35</sup> Barras, suggests women, “Find a male relative, family friend or older friend who will serve in that role. Let him in on the role you want him to play and why.” It should be a person that you can receive genuine guidance and care and acceptance. It is also important to pray and seek guidance from God when finding a surrogate father.

Finally, women need to understand that healing is a process that will take time to complete. Some aspects of healing may happen sooner and more prolonged in others. The journey of healing is not a sprint but a marathon. There will be moments of discouragement when the temptation arises to return the former mindset, in those moments, utilize all of the information offered to reinforce the healing received by God. One of the outcomes women will be able to take away from engaging in the process of healing the father wound would be to encourage others to face the issues that held them

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<sup>34</sup> Barras, 243.

<sup>35</sup> Barras, 244.

captive. Women can use their healing as a testament of the power and care of God.

Another outcome for healing father wounds allows Black women to receive the respect, protection, and acceptance from God and others. Their perception of God and self has transitioned from being averse to positive.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this thesis was to assist Black Christian women in rewriting their identity narrative and reconciling their distorted image of God with an authentic perception of God. The methodology used was a four-part process of discovering the root of the father wound, renouncing the former mindset, embracing God's fatherly love, and living with a healed heart. A fifteen-question survey was used to discover the father wound that asked questions about their father-daughter relationship, identity, heart-type, self-esteem, and perception of God.

Three exercises used to renounce the former mindset included Admitting the Pain; Lies, Fear, Shame, and Truth; and a Forgiveness Letter. Embracing God's fatherly love encourages women to disconnect their distorted view of the Father God-image founded on their personal experiences with their father and embrace the unconditional love offered by God. Living with a healed heart offers women practical steps for transitioning from being a fatherless daughter to a daughter of God by encouraging them to pursue a relationship with God by leaning into the father-daughter aspect. The intended outcome is to provide healing and freedom to Black women whose perception of God and self has been distorted by father wounds, so the women can experience the respect, protection, and acceptance they desire.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The epidemic of father absence in the Black community has left Black women facing debilitating consequences. With a wealth of research on the issue of fatherlessness, there is insufficient research on the impacts father wounds have on African American Christian women's identity and perception of God as a father. This study imparts insight into the effects of father wounds on a woman's perception of God. The study resolved that reconciling father wounds could rewrite the distorted identity narrative and understanding of God within Black Christian women while providing healing and freedom to those who have endured the hardship of the emotional and physical absence of fathers.

Parents have the responsibility of developing the confidence, personality, and character of their children. For the emotional and psychological development of a daughter, her father must be emotional and physically present in her life. The pain of abandonment from her father is debilitating, creating a father wound. The father wound forms in the heart of the daughter, producing a desire to search for male approval and disregard the nurturing love of her mother. With the dismantling of the African American family, Black women are more likely to experience father absence, leaving her feeling neglected, unprotected, and disrespected.

Unlike the physically absent father who is not living in the home, the passive father is emotionally absent yet lives inside the home of his daughter. The emotional absence starves daughters of needed affection, time, and attention. When a daughter does not receive the desired emotional support, she tends to believe that she must work to gain her father's attention. Abusive fathers create the deepest wounds because they induce

obedience, fear, and loyalty through power and control. Daughters of abusive fathers feel inadequate, causing her to keep harmonious relationships through repairing them. Critical fathers lead with disappointment and disapproval. The unrealistic expectations of a critical father breed high standards of perfection for his daughter to receive his approval and validation. The inconsistent father is more focused on his personal life than his fatherly responsibilities. Daughters with inconsistent fathers' harbor emotions of abandonment, low self-esteem, and rejection, believing she must work for her father's love.

The Fatherless Woman Syndrome, developed by Jonetta R. Barras, has five distinct, yet overlapping, symptoms that have psychological and social implications on the lives of Black women affected by fatherlessness. The symptoms are the "Un" factor, Triple Fears factor, Sexual Healing factor, the "Over" factor, and RAD (Rage, Anger, and Depression). Low self-esteem and self-worth are critical identifiers for women displaying the "Un" factor. The impulse for the actions and emotions of a woman with the Triple Fears factor symptom is a fear of rejection, commitment, or abandonment. A fatherless daughter uses the Sexual Healing factor to fill the void in her heart through sexual intimacy or seeking male attention. The "Over" factor permits women to use perfectionism to cover her wound. Perfectionism creates a blanket of shame that deprives her of revealing her authentic self to others. Women with the RAD (Rage, Anger, Depression) factor display a fount of unexplained rage and anger.

The Fatherless Woman Syndrome offers a glimpse into the emotional and psychological effects of father wounds in the relationships of fatherless daughters. Fatherless daughters tend to remain in unhealthy relationships with men in fear of losing

love. They find it challenging to cultivate healthy friendships with others, and may become an overbearing parent. The lens from which fatherless women perceive safety, affection, and identity becomes distorted when she is subjected to unhealthy experiences with her father. Her father-wounded heart will cause her perception of God the Father to be distorted. After encountering the level of pain brought on by her father, the fatherless daughter may perceive God as being unreliable, inaccessible or non-existent, distant or uninvolved, authoritative, or harsh or mean.

The dismantling of the Black family has caused continuous pain for the African American community since the beginning of slavery until the present. For years, the misfortunes of slavery, poverty, drug epidemic, and mass incarceration fractured the African American community reinforcing the absent Black father in US-American society, as well as bolstering the economic advancement for the United States. African Americans did not create the issue of absent Black fathers; instead, it was a systemic creation within slavery. During the time of slavery, Black families were not considered legal families. The disassembling of the Black family commenced since slave families did not receive protection from the family laws that governed the United States. The status of a child was transferred from the father to the mother, to solidify the differentiation of enslaved Black families and legalized White families.

The court system gave White slave masters full governing authority over their slaves because of the declaration that slaves were an altered kind of human being. Enslaved African men were emasculated in their quarters, unable to discipline their children, protect their families from physical or sexual abuse, and govern their homes. The constant selling and separation of families to other plantations in the southern United

States created hindrances that continued to disassemble the Black family. If enslaved men were going to marry, they preferred to marry someone not on their plantations because of the demoralizing treatment of women by planters.

Another systemic issue that contributed to fatherlessness within the Black community is poverty. Poverty has been a topic that is synonymous with the African American community from slavery unto the present. African Americans were freed from slavery without any compensation to start their new lives. In order to keep African Americans separated and inferior to European Americans, laws like Jim Crow were established. In the communities specified for Blacks were overcrowded housing projects, drug use, health concerns, and low paying jobs, which generates violence and hopelessness within the community.

The Welfare system also encouraged fatherlessness in the Black community. In the 1960s, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) eligibility requirements expected women not to be married or have a man living in their homes in order to receive aid. The welfare system was not reformed until 1996 by the Clinton Administration encouraged women to marry to receive aid. During that time, the government hoped to reinstate Black fathers into the homes, except for men who received a drug conviction. Men with a drug conviction were banned from receiving any form of government aid or housing, leaving Black mothers dependent on the government for everything and leaving the children fatherless.

In the 1970s, the African American community was significantly vulnerable to meager resources, violence, and drugs after the death of the most influential Black leaders, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., and the dismantling of the Black

Panther Party. The drug epidemic produced absent fathers within the Black community. Black families suffered the most from the crack epidemic. The obsession for drugs dominated the lives of those addicted to crack cocaine. Most crack users brought great disappointment to their children, who were unable to be dependent on them, creating a more significant burden on their extended families. Some believe that the crack epidemic in the African American communities nation-wide was a race-based punishment and plot of genocide based on the federal sentencing guidelines from the implementation of the War on Drugs. The application of stricter drug sentences and legal barriers for drug-convicted felons happened during the Clinton Administration. These sentences removed Black men from the community, leaving Black single mothers solely responsible for raising her children without any emotional, financial, or spiritual support from inside the home.

One of the most devastating acts to oppose the Black family and reinforce absent fathers within the Black community is mass incarceration. The narrative of African American men has been distorted to society by the media. Uncouth figures were used to emphasize the message that Whites should dread Black men since they were out of control, rapists, criminals, and a threat of evil to White women. President Nixon used coded anti-Black speech to bring law and order to the country in hopes of decreasing the crime rates with the war on crime idea.

The War on Drugs was introduced in the 70s by President Nixon and implemented by President Reagan in the 80s. The War on Drugs criminalized the use of illegal drugs instead of making it a health issue, skyrocketing the prison population. The government-aided police departments were given billions of dollars to militarize their

departments. The extreme policing in the African American community rid the neighborhoods of drugs and its men. The revised prison sentencing guidelines of the “Three Strikes You’re Out” law and mandatory minimums implemented by the Clinton Administration caused the most damage to the African American community. The prison population in the United States spiked dramatically.

The welfare reform gave recipients a maximum of five years of receiving assistance and a lifetime ban for drug convicted felons. The father wounds created by incarcerated fathers had emotional and psychological consequences on their children. The trauma experienced by the children may lead to a repeat of the dysfunctional cycle found within their community.

The Bible provides an accurate perception of God, the Father, by displaying various fatherly attributes of God within the Old and New Testaments. The parental relationship between God and the nation of Israel in the Old Testament demonstrates God as nurturing, protective, patient, and protecting. God identifies himself as “The LORD your God” in Exodus 20:2. The transliteration of the word *Lord* is YAHWEH or JEHOVAH. Those terms mean “truly present” and describe the faithfulness and dependability of God. YAHWEH is the personal name of God that can also mean “I am that I am.”

God, the Father, sustained the children of Israel while journeying through the wilderness for over forty years. God also displays the attribute of being a protective father. Throughout Israel’s struggle with idolatry from Egypt to captivity, God was a patient and faithful father. God acknowledged the fathership of the nation of Israel, in addition to the father of particular individuals in Israel. God specifically sought out David

in 1 Samuel 13:14 to be the replacement King of Israel because he was a man after his own heart. He also stated that Solomon would be his son, and he would be his father. God was very intentional when it came to the fatherless. The Psalms declare God as a father to the fatherless and cares for those forsaken by their parents. To the less fortunate, God instructs people to offer fair treatment and justice in those scriptures. The Daughters of Zeholophed and the story of Esther are two examples of fatherless daughters receiving justice and fair treatment from God and man.

The intimate father-son relationship between God and Jesus in the New Testament reveals the fatherhood of God to Israel. Jesus was the Son of God because he was born of a virgin woman named Mary and the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> Jesus was fully God and fully, man.<sup>2</sup> Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River was an outward confirmation of Jesus' sonship to God.<sup>3</sup> Jesus' sonship was confirmed to three of the disciples on the transfiguration on the mountain.<sup>4</sup> The devil and evil spirits also recognized Jesus' father-son relationship.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus presents a new paradigm for God as a close and intimate father, instructing his children on the importance of morality and integrity in the Sermon on the Mount discourse. Matthew 5:45–48 highlights how God the father influences believers' close relationship with others. In Matthew 6:1–18, Jesus explains the importance of having

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:31.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 1:35.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 1:10–11.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 9:35.

<sup>5</sup> Mark 5:7.

pure motives when fulfilling the three acts of righteousness: giving, prayer, and fasting. Jesus assures them that God is aware of their needs and provides the necessary provisions since He is an all-knowing father. John 5:16–23 reveals God as a validating father. In Romans 8:15–17, God offers liberation through the Spirit of adoption.

Throughout the Bible, father-daughter relationships are not the most prominent relationship types represented; nevertheless, Scripture also offers specific instructions to fathers for raising their children. This study evaluated four biblical father-daughter relationships—Jairus and his daughter, Laban and his daughters Leah and Rachel; Jacob and Dinah; and David and Tamar—to discover the type of father each man represents and the heart type of the daughter. The narrative depicts Jairus as an active, present, and loving father to his twelve-year-old daughter. With this example of a father’s love, Jairus’ daughter probably would not have incurred a father-wounded heart.

Laban demonstrated the attributes of a present, protective, loving, and concerned father. From the passage, Rachel and Leah would not have incurred father-wounded hearts because of their father’s physical presence, emotional support, and tender care. Based on the narrative provided, Jacob was emotionally unavailable and would be considered a passive father. Dinah was not protected, acknowledged, or affirmed by her father, Jacob; she would have incurred a father-wounded heart. From this narrative, David failed to protect and acknowledge his daughter after she was raped. He would be classified as a passive father. Tamar was left rejected, humiliated, and desolate for the rest of her life; she would have incurred a father-wounded heart.

This study used personal interviews and online surveys as its methodology to collect research. This mechanism explored the association of father-daughter

relationships and the perception of God in Black Christian women. The questions in the online survey highlighted a woman's perception of God relative to her relationship with her father and how those relationships influenced her self-esteem and self-worth. The personal interview format offered questions to women with various theological ideologies. Those theological perspectives represented in the research are traditional Christian, Feminist, and Womanist.

The findings confirm that father wounds are voids created in the hearts of Black Christian women. The results of the interviews and online survey show the self-esteem and self-worth of women were negatively affected the most by physically or emotionally absent fathers. Higher self-esteem and self-worth are in women whose fathers were emotionally present. The findings also confirm that women who have a fractured relationship with their father will have a distorted view of God as a father.

Women with alternative theological perspectives did not perceive God as a father because of their relationship with their father and their non-traditional Christian beliefs. Most women with a traditional Christian theological perspective perceived God as a father but had difficulty either embracing God's love or seeing God without a distorted view. The majority of women surveyed and interviewed cite that over time, spiritual formation and a consistent relationship with God helped to improve their confidence. With God's help, some were able to forgive their emotionally or physically absent fathers.

Feminist and womanist theologies may be alternative theological perspectives for some women who have father wounds. These theologies contest the societal foundations of patriarchy and embrace the feminine attributes of God's character. Feminism started as

a social movement seeking liberation for White US-American women from all forms of sexism. There was a differentiation between Black and White feminists during the 1960s. Within feminist theology, there are three distinct types: Revolutionary Feminist Theology, Reformist Feminist Theology, and Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology.

Revolutionary Feminist Theology identifies as more radical feminists who conclude Christianity is primarily anti-woman and advocate for a more women-centered culture. Reformist Feminist Theology opposes the societal gender bias treatment of women but accepts the standard view of Christian theology as it relates to the Trinity. Reconstructionist Christian Feminist Theology seeks to reestablish the structures of civil society and church by liberating the core of the Christian tradition. The image of God represented by most feminists is genderless. Additional designations for God held by feminists from the Old Testament are Liberator, Covenant-Maker, and Creator.

Two feminine nouns gaining attention as essential personifications for God are *Hokmah* and *Sophia*—“Wisdom” in Hebrew and Greek, respectively—because of feminists seeking to bring equality. Most feminists vehemently oppose the traditional symbolism of Father-God in Christian Theology because of the dehumanization of women and the justification of patriarchy in society and Christian churches. The feminists who remain in Christianity argue for the use of gender-neutral God language because they do not support the masculine God identity.

Womanist theology encompasses the unique experiences of Black women and highlights the realities faced in history, culture, literature, and religion. A womanist is a Black feminist or feminist of color—the term coined by Alice Walker. The theological

constructs of womanist theology aim to ask two questions relative to African American women and faith: “How do Black women name God?” and “Where is God in the lives of African American women?” Womanist theologians describe God as a God of survival, a God of resistance against evil, and a God of liberation. For most womanists, Black men and women reflect God’s strength through survival. God’s presence in human history serves as light for social transformation by the empowering Spirit. Womanists have their trinity for the empowering Spirit of God: God, Jesus, and all creation are enwombed together inextricably.<sup>6</sup>

This dissertation suggests that womanist and feminist theology do not offer the most effective solution for healing father wounds. These perspectives do not provide an adequate method of healing father wounds; instead using the wound to influence the exclusion of patriarchy and the father image of God. Moreover, revolutionary feminist theology would not be useful for healing father wounds in women within the Black church because it encourages women to cast aside traditional Christianity.

The proposed methodology needed to assist Black Christian women in rewriting their identity narrative and reconciling an authentic perception of God distorted by father wounds is a four-part process designed to explore the method of healing father wounds through discovering the root of the father wound; renouncing the former mindset that created a distorted view of self, God, and their father; practical steps for embracing God’s fatherly love; and the benefits of living with a healed heart. A detailed survey assists women in identifying the root of their father wound by evaluating their personality types,

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<sup>6</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher and Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, *My Sister, My Brother: Womanist and Xodus God-Talk* (New York, Orbis Books, 1997), 31.

their father-daughter relationship, and their perception of God. The survey questions also reveal the psychological framework that molded her ability to communicate and relate to others, the expectations of future experiences with men, and her self-image.

Renouncing the former mindset explores three exercises: Admitting the Pain; Lies, Fear, Shame, and Truth; and a Forgiveness Letter. Admitting the pain permits women to acknowledge how the unspoken hurt shaped their personality, mindset, and their perception of God. The four-part exercise of Lies, Fear, Shame, and Truth helps to identify the underlying beliefs developed in their heart affected by father wounds and tools needed for rewriting their identity narrative. The purpose of this exercises is to write a new God-given narrative and denounce the cynical perspective that established their distorted view of self. The act of forgiveness releases the power of the pain over the wounded person and commences either in written form or face to face. The forgiveness letter allows for women to explain the dimensions of the wound, how it shaped their lives, the cause, and possible consequences.

Embracing God's fatherly love encourages women to embrace the unconditional love offered by God and disconnect their distorted view of the Father God-image founded on their personal experiences with their father. A clear description of the character of God is in the unconditional love exemplified within scripture. Through Jesus Christ, God is present in the lives of believers. A notable character trait of God is reliability that upholds the righteous from failing.

For father-wounded women, the idea of God being a father has caused contempt because of their fathers' behavior demonstrated through their words, actions, presence, or non-presence. They use earthly examples to conclude that God hinders the ability to

experience the actual identity of God. Although God may have the title of Father, he is not their earthly father. Embracing God's fatherly love casts down the strongholds erected by father wounds allowing women to love freely.

Living with a healed heart allows women to officially transition to a daughter of God from being a fatherless daughter. The father-daughter relationship with God allows women to experience the protection, healing, provision, peace, comfort, and consistency of God. Women have access to consistent communication to ask questions and seek clarity from God. The armor of God offers to women who have felt unprotected; these women can rest in the protection of God. Living with a healed heart permits women to engage in life with intentionality and purpose. They can change behavior patterns and take ownership of their actions, resulting in higher self-esteem and confidence. The women learn how to trust and love again, allowing them to become more vulnerable and feminine. The new life experienced as a daughter of God establishes the protection, acceptance, and respect Black Christian women desire.

#### *Limitations of Study*

The limitations of this study include the smallness of the sample size of women used for gathering field research. Increasing the number of women interviewed could have lessened the generalizations of the impacts of father wounds on large populations with such limited responses. Father absence is not an issue only found in the African American community; by solely focusing on one particular racial group can limit the research by emphasizing issues that are not prevalent in other racial or ethnic communities. The minimal discussion of patriarchy is another area of limitation found in this study. The issue of patriarchy was mentioned in the alternative perspectives but not

entirely discussed in the dissertation. Acknowledging the impacts of patriarchy could have provided additional insight into the topic of father wounds.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This project laid the foundation for future research. The devastating consequences of father wounds are too broad of a subject to offer a complete solution in one place. Father wounds can pose such a terrifying emotion of abandonment that this document is intentionally deficient of absolutes. Father absence is a major epidemic and pandemic plague with no respect for race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Therefore, understanding and healing father wounds is a necessary evil that must be allowed for a greater good to result. Below is a list of recommendations for further study.

#### *Types of Racism*

Further investigation into other ethnic groups can increase the knowledge of the social and spiritual implications of father absence in the lives of women. Also, supplementary research into sociological factors introduces varying categories of racism into the father-daughter dynamic. For instance, structural, institutional, systemic, casual, individual, and environmental racism can be explored as a means of discovering a new ministry context.

#### *Gender Construction Controversies*

Another recommendation is to consider research into the influence gender construct may have on father wounds. Most people may not identify with this perspective but rather see essentialist characteristics of each gender. I am aware of the controversies around gender. A discussion of these broader issues is beyond the scope of this

dissertation. However, there are places where continued research may be integrated to develop a strategy that expands to include the appropriate audience.

### *Mother Wounds*

Next, a critical research focus must include the topic of mother wounds. We all need both mothers and fathers to be approving, loving, and caring. We need the balance of what both parents bring, but has our culture privileged the need for male approval as more profound? A key component of healing wounds is to consider the power of the parental balance in the relationship when healing parent-child wounds.

### *Generational Effect*

An opportunity of mammoth proportion, crucial to future study, is the generational effect of father wounds. The pattern of the absent father syndrome can usually be traced through generations.

"Many men feel that their fathers are disappointed in them. They come to learn, though, that they can never fulfill their fathers' expectations and are unable to gain the approval, respect, and acceptance they want from their fathers."<sup>7</sup> They soon understand that the feeling of betrayal runs through their father's stories. Inherent to their own childhood experience, these absent fathers unknowingly act out a painful memory through unfair treatment to their children.

The courage to undertake a search that uncovers the deep-seated wounds these absent fathers may carry is a move in the right direction. This type of research has the potential to change a perpetual, unhealthy behavior.

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<sup>7</sup> Bob Pease, "Beyond The Father Wound: Memory-Work And The Deconstruction Of The Father-son Relationship." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* 21, no. 1 (2000): 13, <https://doi-org.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/j.1467-8438.2000.tb00405.x>.

*Patriarchy on Women in the Church*

Finally, generalities about feminine and/or masculine characteristics of mothers and fathers and male and female have been used in this thesis. These types of essentialist attributes are generally accepted by the women in this study who understand it to be a part of their context but can be distracting to others that see them as cultural constructions. Therefore, further study into the nature of patriarchal culture in the Black Church should be implemented as a recognition of the views of feminist and womanist theology.

The need for increased examination and discussion of feminist and womanist critiques of patriarchy in Black culture would be a needed next step in this research area. “Wide spread cultural changes that result in higher value being placed on women’s experiences, and changes in child rearing practices...break down rigid divisions between men and women’s roles...”<sup>8</sup> Further research on the experience of patriarchy on women in the Black church and its relationship to the deep impact of father wounds would expand this study.

**Chapter Summary**

The primary purpose of the research was to bring awareness to Black Christian women of the ways father wounds impact their identity and perception of God. Hopefully, this study provides fatherless daughters with practical steps to heal their brokenness. A quote from Iyanla Vansant, on how to heal the wounds from your past will sum up the difficult task of all fatherless daughters to become healthy and whole:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 15.

You can accept or reject the way you are treated by other people, but until you heal the wounds of your past, you will continue to bleed. You can bandage the bleeding with food, with alcohol, with drugs, with work, with cigarettes, with sex, but eventually, it will all ooze through and stain your life. You must find the strength to open the wounds, stick your hands inside, pull out the core of the pain that is holding you in your past, the memories, and make peace with them.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Iyanla Vanzant: How to Heal the Wounds of Your Past” Oprah’s Life Class, accessed December 13, 2019, <http://www.oprah.com/oprahs-lifeclass/ianla-vanzant-how-to-heal-the-wounds-of-your-past#ixzz682lf3sIV>.

APPENDIX A:  
IRB SURVEY QUESTIONS

**Who is God the Father to African American Women?**

You have the ability to take this survey online at:

<https://goo.gl/forms/cAnGQfn1kzjut2Lf1>.

Below you will find the written questionnaire.

**Survey**

Please be as honest as possible when answering each question.

1. What is the role of a father for a daughter?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Identify the type of father that had the most significant impact on your life? (Good or Bad) Circle one.
  - a. Biological Father
  - b. Step Father
  - c. Father Figure
  - d. Other:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How has your self-esteem and self-worth been affected by your relationship with God?

4. What do you need the most from your father? Circle one.

- a. Love
- b. Time
- c. Assurance
- d. Identity
- e. All of the above
- f. Other:

5. Describe your relationship with your father.

6. How active is your father in your life? Circle one.

- a. Very Active
- b. Active
- c. Inconsistent
- d. Never met him
- e. Other:

7. Describe God's role as a Father.

8. Do you perceive God as a father? Circle one.

- a. Yes
- b. No

c. Maybe

9. How has the presence/non-presence of your father affected your self-esteem and self-worth?
  
10. How has your relationship with your father affected your view of God?
  
11. What are some characteristics of God that are similar to an earthly father?
  
12. Describe your relationship with God.

APPENDIX B:  
IRB INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**George Fox Dissertation Interview Questions**

Interviewer: LaSondra Barnes

1. What is the role of a father for a daughter?
2. Describe your relationship with your father. (Biological/Step/Father Figure)
3. What are some characteristics of a good father?
4. How has your self-esteem or self-worth attributed to your relationship with your father?
5. Describe your view of God.
6. Do you perceive God as your father? If so, why?
7. How has your relationship with your father affected your perception of God as father?
8. How has your self-esteem or self-worth attributed to your relationship with God?
9. How has your relationship with God influenced your relationship with your father?

10. Describe your relationship with God.

11. How did you improve your perception of God?

12. What else should I have asked?

## George Fox Dissertation Interview Questions - Alternative

Interviewer: LaSondra Barnes

1. What is the role of a father for a daughter?
2. Describe your relationship with your father. (Biological/ Step/ Father Figure)
3. What are some characteristics of a good father?
4. How has your self-esteem or self-worth attributed to your relationship with your father?
5. Describe your view of God.
6. Do you perceive God as your father? If so, why?
7. What are your views on patriarchy in Bible and Theology?
8. Do you identify as a Womanist and Feminist?
9. What are some scriptures that supports your theological your perspective?
10. How has your relationship with your fathers effected your perception of God as Father?
11. How has your relationship with your father effected your perception of God as father?

12. How has your self-esteem or self-worth attributed to your relationship with God?
13. How has your relationship with God influenced your relationship with your father?
14. Describe your relationship with God.
15. How did you improve your perception of God?
16. What else should I have asked?

## APPENDIX C:

## CHAPTER 5 THESIS MATERIALS - DISCOVERING THE FATHER WOUND

## SURVEY

**Discovering The Father Wound Survey**

1. Write down a word that would describe the state of their relationship with their father.
2. Describe your relationship with your father based on the selected word?
3. Identify the type of father that had the most significant impact on your life:
  - a. Biological Father
  - b. Step Father
  - c. Father Figure
  - d. Other:
4. How active is your father in your life?
  - a. Very Active
  - b. Active
  - c. Inconsistent
  - d. Never met him
  - e. Other:
5. What do you need the most from your father?
  - a. Love
  - b. Time
  - c. Assurance
  - d. Identity
  - e. All of the above
  - f. Other:
6. How has the presence/non-presence of your father affected your self-esteem and self-worth?

7. Select the heart-type that best reflects your personality and heart relative to your relationship with your father:
  - a. The Bruised Heart<sup>1</sup>
  - b. The Performance Heart<sup>2</sup>
  - c. The Hardened Heart<sup>3</sup>
  - d. The Addicted Heart<sup>4</sup>
  
8. Select the symptom of the Fatherless Daughter Syndrome that would best describe your personality:
  - a. The “Un” Factor<sup>5</sup>
  - b. The Triple Fears Factor<sup>6</sup>
  - c. The “Over” Factor<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A woman with a bruised heart is sensitive. She feels like she is never good enough to live up to the expectations of those around her, especially her father. She feels insecure, ashamed, and fearful. This woman lives in survival mode believing she must look out for herself because she cannot depend on others. She is afraid of being abandoned she sabotages relationships and withdraws before getting hurt. See H. Norman Wright, *Healing for the Father Wound: A Trusted Christian Counselor Offers Time-Tested Advice* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishing, 2008), 18–19, Kindle.

<sup>2</sup> A woman with a performance heart is driven to be the best at everything she does. This woman looks to those of status for validation. The cadence of her heart is, “I can do it. I will do it.” Her driving forces are disappointment, doubt, inadequacy, and fear of failure. See Wright, *Healing*, 19, Kindle.

<sup>3</sup> A woman with a hardened heart is tremendously hurt by her father. She desired approval and protection but only received disappointment. This woman shuts down emotionally and cuts off her heart. Her heart is as hard as concrete. The only emotion she allows herself to feel is anger, and it comes out so strongly. See Wright, *Healing*, 19, Kindle.

<sup>4</sup> A woman with an addicted heart latches onto anything that can cover the pain on the inside. Food, substances, activities, or people are all used as substitutes that are unable to live up its promises to heal her wounded heart. See Wright, *Healing*, 20, Kindle.

<sup>5</sup> A woman exhibiting the “Un” Factor believes she is unloved or unwanted. This woman did not receive the approval of her father, so she likely has low self-esteem and self-worth. This woman loves hard and believe she earns love through performance.

<sup>6</sup> This Triple Fear Factor is fostered by fear. This fatherless woman fears rejection, abandonment, or commitment. With this internal struggle commencing, she will hide behind a mask of perfection, which leads to being inauthentic. She normally dates men who treat her poorly, unable to commit, or emotionally unavailable.

<sup>7</sup> The Over Factor is expressed when a woman uses perfectionism to cover her wound. She is determined not to allow anyone male or female to discover her wound. She is known as an over achiever. The motivation behind her success is to silently prove to her father that she was able to make it without him.

- d. The Sexual Healing Factor<sup>8</sup>
  - e. The “RAD” (Rage, Anger, and Depression) Factor<sup>9</sup>
9. Do you perceive God as a father?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Maybe
10. Describe God’s role as a Father.
11. How has your relationship with your father affected your view of God?
12. What are some characteristics of God that are similar to an earthly father?
13. Describe your relationship with God.
14. How has your self-esteem and self-worth been affected by your relationship with God?
15. What kind of father do you currently or have perceived God to be?
- a. Unreliable
  - b. Inaccessible or non-existent
  - c. Distant and uninvolved
  - d. Authoritative
  - e. Harsh or mean
  - f. Other:

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<sup>8</sup> A woman with the Sexual Healing Factor seeks male attention and sexual intimacy to fill the wounds in her heart. She controls all aspects of the way she engages intimacy. If she is unable to find the closeness she desires from a man, she will have a baby to fill the loneliness. The sexual healing factor is the primary indicator of a fatherless daughter.

<sup>9</sup> The RAD (Rage, Anger, and Depression) factor can be a fount of unexplained anger and rage. A woman exhibiting this factor will have a short temper and strong disconnection to her heart. Because of the significant disappointments she experienced from her father, she is unable to trust others, she will only depend on herself. Rage, anger, and depression will be the leading emotions in the life of a fatherless daughter.

## APPENDIX D:

## CHAPTER 5 THESIS MATERIALS – RENOUNCING THE FORMER MINDSET

**Renouncing the Former Mindset**

I admit these are areas of my life that have caused pain in my life and the reason why this pain needs repair:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

**How do you perceive yourself?**

<b>Attributes I like about myself</b>	<b>Attributes I dislike about myself</b>

**Lies, Fear, Shame, and Truth Exercise<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Lie: Negative Attribute</b>	<b>Fear: What are you afraid will happen?</b>

<b>Lies</b>	<b>Fears</b>	<b>Shame</b>
<b>Negative Attributes</b>	<b>What are you afraid will happen?</b>	<b>What event caused guilt?</b>

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<sup>1</sup> LaSondra Barnes, *Rejected to Accepted: Learning to Love Myself After Adversity* (Meadville, PA: Christian Faith Publishing, 2019), 53–57.

### Truth Affirmation Scriptures<sup>2</sup>

1. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:13–14)
2. I am happy with the way I am made. I am made in God’s image, fashioned by His hands. He knew me before I was born. (Jeremiah 1:5, Psalms 119:73, Genesis 1:27)
3. I am a chosen and valuable treasure, I belong to God, He knows and calls me by my name. God validates me, I matter to Him. (1 Peter 2:9, Exodus 19:5, Isaiah 43:1, John 15:16)
4. I am the apple of God’s eye, He has engraved me on the palms of His hands for He cares for the details of my life—even the number of my hair. (Matthew 10:30, Isaiah 49:16, Zechariah 2:8)
5. I seek first the kingdom of God and live in perfect love, which casts out fear of men or circumstances. (Matthew 6:33–34, 1 John 4:18)
6. I delight myself in the Lord and He gives me the desires of my heart. (Psalm 37:4)
7. I am the workmanship of the Most High God. I am in His family. He sees the good in me and designed me for greatness. (Ephesians 1:4, Genesis 1:31, Ephesians 2:10)
8. I humble myself and cast all my anxieties on Jesus, because He cares for me. (1 Peter 5:7, Psalm 55:22)
9. I fear no evil, nor am I dismayed, for God is with me; His rod and staff comforts me, He strengthens and upholds me. (Isaiah 41:10, Psalm 23:4)
10. I cling to the Lord, my help comes from Him, He supports and sustains me. (Psalm 121:1, Psalm 63:8)
11. I know God is for me, He is my light and salvation, the Lord is on my side, man can do nothing to hurt me, none can successfully come against me. (Psalm 27:1, Romans 8:31, Psalm 118:6)

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<sup>2</sup> “Self-esteem Affirmations,” The Gossip 4 Jesus Initiative, accessed October 24, 2019, <https://gossipforjesus.com/2016/04/18/the-christian-identity-affirmation/>.

12. The Lord saves me from my enemies, He restores my confidence and firmly secures me in high places. (Psalm 18:3, Psalm 50:15, 2 Samuel 22:34)
13. I call to the Lord in my anxiety, He is my protection, refuge and strength. He is ever present in times of trouble. (Psalm 46:1)
14. I have no fear or worry about my future; for eye has not seen, nor ear heard, the great and mighty things God has prepared for me. (1 Corinthians 2:9)
15. I call unto God whenever I am afraid, He answers me, and shows me great and mighty things, which I don't know. (Jeremiah 33:3)
16. I am empowered. I present everything to God in prayer and through thanksgiving guard my heart with the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding. (Philippians 4:6–13, Matthew 6:25–34)
17. My life has purpose and meaning. I am unique and special. There is nobody on earth like me. I appreciate my unique qualities and abilities. (Deuteronomy 7:6)
18. The Lord directs me and establishes my steps. When I fall, I won't stay down, He will pick me up. When negative thoughts assail me, God consoles and comforts my soul (Psalm 37:23–24, Psalm 94:19)
19. I demolish every thought or pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God in me, I take captive negative and unbiblical thoughts and make them obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)
20. I rebuke the spirit of timidity, and receive a spirit of boldness, power, love and a sound mind. (2 Timothy 1:7)
21. I am spiritually wise, I shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven. (Daniel 12:3)
22. I am justified by my faith, I have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1–5)
23. I am rooted in Christ, securely grounded in His love, He dwells in my heart. (Ephesians 3:17)

24. I am never alone, God is always with me. He will never leave nor forsake me. (Joshua 1:5)
25. I am loved, just the way I am! God loves me with an everlasting love. (Jeremiah 31:3)
26. I am a new creature in Jesus Christ, I have newness of life. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
27. I am protected, He that keeps me neither sleeps nor slumbers. (Psalm 121:3)
28. I am the light of the world, the salt of the earth. (Matthew 5:13–14)
29. I am a child of the Most-High God. (Psalm 82:6)
30. I am forgiven. (Psalm 103:12)

<b>Lies</b>	<b>Fears</b>	<b>Shame</b>	<b>Truth</b>
<b>Negative Attributes</b>	<b>What are you afraid will happen?</b>	<b>What event caused guilt?</b>	<b>What does the Bible say about me?</b>

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