

So today on this very special day for Father's I want us to think for a few minutes about the Father's love. I don't mean the love that Fathers and other male role models have had for us, but instead about our Heavenly Father God. All of us today have a dad, but some of us have different thoughts or memories of our dads. For some of us those are good thoughts and for some they're not so good. For some of us today if we were to describe our dads we would say they come out with really bad jokes or they are always checking in on what we are doing, but all in all we know that our dads today are awesome. When you have a really good dad it's therefore easy to picture what your Heavenly Father is like, but what do you do today if you never had a dad around in your life, or maybe you feel that your dad didn't do a good job. It might be very hard therefore to know what our Father God's love is like if you have a bad memory of your earthly dad's love. So to help us let's look at our reading from 1 John 3:1 – it says 'See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!' So what does the word lavish mean? Well it means luxurious or when someone gives very generously. So God loves us so much that he wants to be extremely generous to us. This reading says that if we know God we are considered his children. You may never have thought that you could have 2 dads, but God loves you more than you can imagine, and far more than any earthly father can. And so today if you haven't had a good image of love from your earthly father, then remember that God does love you and his love is lavished over you.

Now does that mean you can have whatever you want from God? Does it mean that he will give you every thing and every time? That you have Christmas every day? Well now quite. If we think about when we were growing up, we may remember being out on the street playing football. In my case I used to play curby where you get a football and try to hit the curb on the opposite side of the street. The only problem was that the ball often didn't hit the curb but often went into our neighbours garden. We used to run in and out and in and out to the point that the neighbour was getting really annoyed. So did my dad just ignore that and let me do whatever I want, letting me annoy the neighbours? No. He would come out and stop me from playing so that I wouldn't get into trouble.

Another example I remember was on holiday in America with Alison and the boys. Not long after getting there we found a shop that sold the most enormous jar of cheese balls. So we bought them, not realising that the boys would just eat and eat and eat until they were nearly sick. But because of my love for them I took the cheese balls off them.

So does that love seem lavish? You might think not. But sometimes God shows his love for us through his protection for us. In our first reading Jesus said that when we ask of God we will receive from him, but that doesn't mean we can ever treat God as like Santa Claus. God will only give us what he thinks is important to help us grow. So don't expect that if you ask God for a new playstation or the latest iPhone that he's going to give it to you. Our reading says that he will never give us bad things to harm us, but neither will God simply give us anything we ask for – he will always protect us, but we have to choose whether to listen to his direction – a bit like whether we are willing to obey what our dads instruct us to do. But we know that God will always give us the things that build us up, shape us for our future and protect us from any dangers that would try to destroy us.

I'm going to give you an illustration today which I hope helps explain this. I'm going to call it Pop Goes My Heart.

[ILLUSTRATION – with balloons and a label on the outside saying 'God's Love'. Then putting a needle through the balloon without the balloon bursting].

We are going to take this balloon and pretend it's you and me. So the needle represents dangerous things in life. The needle makes the balloon burst.

But with the Father's love he wants to protect you. So we are going to take another balloon, but we are going to write the Father's love on a bit of tape. And now that I put the needle into the balloon it doesn't pop.

Isn't that amazing how God loves us and protects us from the things that might harm us.

So what about kids who don't have a dad around or where your dad has messed up? Well we can always count upon God our heavenly Father to protect us and to lavish us with his love. You see this bowl of ice cream – I'm going to show you how much God lavishes us with his love. [Illustration of icecream with whipped cream] God doesn't want to give you a little whipped cream, he wants to lavish you with it.

**So today know that God is your Heavenly Father who will never let you down. And if you know him as your Lord, then you are considered his child, and he always wants to give generously to us. Even if our dads have messed up, God will always be there and we can always count on him.**