

February 2021

Dear Friends,

After my father died I spent some time reflecting on his life and the things we did together. I remembered the fun we had doing certain things together; the times I needed to be challenged and disciplined; the lessons I learned, some the hard way. And how blessed I was to even have a father. As I was thinking, what came to mind with absolute clarity, more so than anything else, were those times when he'd said "I'm proud of you."

Those words meant more than anything else he could have said to me, because I knew he meant them and they were from his heart. The phrase "I'm proud of you" is powerful and full of meaning. It can change one's life and one's world. These words are meant to build someone up, offer encouragement and recognise an achievement.

"I'm proud of you." Full stop, or better yet, exclamation mark! There's no waffle in this blessing, no *"buts,"* nothing else to do. Not, *"I'm proud of you, but if you could only get married...then we could have a grandchild."* Or *"I'm proud of you, it almost makes up for those teenage years."* Or *"I'm proud of you, almost as much as I am of your brother."*

At Jesus' baptism God said... *"This is my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."* A little blessing goes a long way, "Great job.... Well done." Studies show that in the heart of every child is a cry for parental approval. Something happens when a father or mother says to their child, *"I'm so proud of you."* The timing of God's words strike me because Jesus hadn't done anything at this point. It was before he started his ministry, giving the impression that God's great love and pleasure in Jesus has nothing to do with any accomplishment.

Maybe I'm speaking for myself but I think there are no more important words to hear, than to hear from your parents or from anyone else for that matter, "I'm proud of you." Even "I love you" doesn't carry with it perhaps what the phrase was meant to convey. After all it's expected our parents will love us, it's expected that God will love us. But saying, "I'm proud of you" seems to offer an affirmation that's unexpected and different.

Your earthly father may have always been present in your life, or maybe you didn't know him or he wasn't always around. You may or may not have known what it took to make him proud of you and rarely, if ever, felt like you accomplished that goal.

Well, forget that for a moment. I believe that through this phrase God wants us to know that we also are his beloved and that he is well pleased with us. He wants us to wake up every day knowing that we are his beloved, unconditionally loved and wholly approved. The Lord is proud of you simply because you're his child and he thinks you're pretty special. You're heavenly Father loves you when you're generous and kind. He loves you when you're selfish and mean. God doesn't focus on all the bad stuff when he looks at your life. That sin has been covered by the cross! He delights in who you are because you are his. What he does see is his *"beloved child, in whom he is well pleased."*

Rev'd Nicki