

My dad went through a red light once. Well, maybe more than once, but there's only one time that sticks out in my brain. I was quite young—old enough to know that red means stop, but not old enough to know anything else about the rules of the road. He had been sent to get some last-minute things for dinner, if my memory is correct, and I tagged along with him. Going through the last light into our little subdivision of Fort McMurray he stopped at the red light, and then seeing no one else he proceeded, and in my head alarm bells started going off apparently because when we got home, I told on him. Remember, I'm the youngest child, and therefore the most annoying, and also a good-two-shoes so, this is all in character. "Mom, dad went through a red light."

That was the day that I learned you can turn right on a red.

My driving memories with him are not all traumatic though. I remember pulling out city maps in Edmonton, long before GPSs were in every car, and he and I would plot out our map through the big city, and I was quite proud when I found a route that would not only get us there eventually, but was actually not a bad idea as far as directions go. And I remember sleeping in the car a lot. On the way to my brothers' early morning hockey practices and late night games, or traveling down and up Highway 63. I slept so much I must've trusted my dad's driving after that scary red-light infraction of my younger years.

My dad was typically the driver, and while that's not the case in every relationship—Becky and I have been closer to 50/50 through the years, and in others it's all the woman—the gender here doing a particular role is not the point, but in anything dad does do, you want to know that you are being taken care of, that you can trust him. Whether that's making sure the chicken is cooked all the way through, or if he's taking you on a roller coaster, or dropping you off at college, you want to trust dad, and you want to know from him that everything is going to be okay. And while I think I had that pretty solid father, I know that isn't the case for all, and for some it was the complete opposite.

So Father's Day can be a tough one. It can be a day of uncertainty and resentment. It can be a day of forced reunion where that is overwhelming, or one of no contact when reconciliation is all that you might want. If that is your experience this Father's Day, I want to say that I am sorry, sorry for two reasons. First, it is not right that you were robbed of the care and concern and relationship that you didn't receive because of with whatever went wrong. It's not right, and it's one of those nasty side effects of sin in this world, corrupting relationships. I am sorry that this is a burden you've had to bear.

But I'm also sorry that, because your relationship with your earthly father hasn't been the best, it has likely affected your understanding of God the Father. Now certainly for some people, because their relationship with dad was so terrible, they hear they have another Father and they just cling to that; there's a good replacement and it feels natural to just believe that. For others, it is much more difficult. Because of their dad, to trust any dad, especially our heavenly Father who is supposed to take perfect care of us, trusting can feel like an impossibility.

What you're dealing with in the extreme is what everyone deals with to some extent. Our heavenly Father, even more so than our earthly fathers, He does not let us in on all the details and He doesn't ever completely hand the reigns over to us. And the way that He goes about life and help and salvation can be quite different than we might design.

Paul, in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, has been describing the suffering of the Christian, and the details he shares are not hypothetical—they are personal, well-known to him over these past years. He has dealt with his thorn in the flesh; he has been imprisoned and shipwrecked and exiled; he has suffered the painful consequences of sin, his and others, and he knows what it is like to yearn for immortality and incorruptibility to finally be his. He groans, not denying his suffering or downplaying it but fully facing it and knowing still just how much better it will be to be with his Lord at last. And because He had met the risen Christ, because He believed the Gospel, He could carry on—"We know" he says over and over again.

We know the truth of the matter—that Christ has died, that our future is secured, that the guilt of our sin and the threat of the Law and death are all done away with. Yet how it all plays out remains a mystery. How the kingdom sprouts up is much less linear and sensical than we would like. We don't often know the inner workings of how God is working, why He's going about it as He is, but Jesus says that the kingdom, born into our lives, born into our world, planted, it will grow as we carry on and even without our understanding.

Why do some suffer so severely the brokenness of this world? Why do some skate on by seemingly unscathed? Why do some fall away from the faith for a time? Why do others cling so dearly and faithfully all their days? The whys will rarely be answered on this side of eternity, and certainly never answered to our satisfaction. We are left with more questions unanswered than we can imagine, and yet that is not a sign of God's unfaithfulness or any lack of love.

He has always worked in mystery, beyond what the human mind can naturally understand. Christ spoke in parables through much of His teaching ministry. The people of the Old Testament and New often didn't fully understand what God was asking or doing. We have salvation because God took on flesh, and bled and died. None of this makes human sense. And even if we had an airtight answer, it would not suffice for our faithlessness.

Paul tells us that we walk by faith and not by sight—this is the Christian's lot until we see Christ face to face. And this would be simply impossible if it were left up to us. But the Father has planted faith, the kingdom of God, into us—by the working of the Holy Spirit as the word of Christ is preached—and therefore we can confess this faith and believe it, even when life would seem to inspire doubt and fear and confusion. And in spite of such a lowly gift—words preached into eardrums, water dripping over a forehead, a dry wafer and some cheap wine given to us—these gifts are certain because they come from the One who alone can be trusted, and they sprout up into more than we could ever fathom.

Out of what is planted within us comes faith that perseveres, comes love that serves the others' needs, comes praise that glorifies our God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost now in time and certainly into eternity.

You Father in Heaven loves you. You won't always get what He's doing in your life or why, but because He sent Christ to die and to rise for you, you can be certain that His love and grace and mercy for you aren't going anywhere, and because He has preached that news to you, planting it in your heart by His Holy Spirit, you can trust in Him today and all the days of your life, walking not by sight, but by faith in your Saviour.

In His Name.

Amen.