

Not Forsaken

Louie Giglio

Finding Freedom as
Sons & Daughters of a Perfect Father

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Contents



About the Author	4
Introduction	5
Session 1: The Universal Craving	6
Session 2: The Most Important Thing about You . . .	30
Session 3: Seeing God as a Perfect Father	52
Session 4: Your New Family Tree	76
Session 5: Finding Freedom	100
Session 6: Just like Dad!	124
Leader Guide	146

About the Author



Louie Giglio is the pastor of Passion City Church and the founder of the Passion movement, which exists to call a generation to leverage their lives for the fame of Jesus.

Since 1997 Passion has gathered college-aged young people in events across the United States and around the world. Notably, in 2017 more than fifty-five thousand students gathered for Passion 2017 in Atlanta's Georgia Dome for one of the largest Jesus-focused collegiate events in history. Each year Passion continues to see eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds fill venues across the nation in pursuit of lives lived for God's glory.

In addition to the collegiate gatherings of Passion Conferences, Louie and his wife, Shelley, lead the teams at Passion City Church, sixstepsrecords, and the Passion Global Institute.

Louie is the author of national best sellers *Not Forsaken* and *Goliath Must Fall; The Comeback; The Air I Breathe; I Am Not but I Know I Am;* and *Indescribable: 100 Devotions about God and Science*, his first children's book.

Louie and Shelley make their home in Atlanta, Georgia.

Introduction

This study is for everyone who has a father. And for everyone who knows what it's like to long for a father's blessing—a father's approval, affection, and attention. For anyone who longs to hear your daddy say, "I love you, and I'm so proud of you."

Maybe that blessing has been present in your life. But maybe it hasn't. Or maybe the blessing was there for a time, but then it slipped away. Or maybe the approval was never there in quite the way you wanted it to be. You always felt it was performance-based instead of unconditional.

Many of us have never known the blessing—or the full blessing—of our earthly dads. What's worse, some of us are stuck with the fact that the possibility of ever hearing our dads say, "I love you, and I'm so proud of you" is gone—washed away by death, distance, or disinterest. The blessing we long for is mired in a pit of regret, pain, or abandonment. This is our reality, and we can do little or nothing to change it. We feel it's too late.

Longing for our father's approval is innate and universal, and we definitely didn't always get it from the man who was responsible for bringing us into this world.

We all have different experiences with our dads, but the craving for our fathers' approval is the same. Maybe you fully possess that blessing, and you're thinking, *I love my dad!* That's a gift I hope you'll thank him for today. But maybe there's a palpable, uneasy silence right now as you're reading, and you're thinking about bailing on this study. You don't want to peel back the layers of your heart to examine your relationship with your dad. It's too painful, and the hurts are too recent, too real.

Regardless of what your life's journey looks like, I encourage you to stay with me. Keep reading. Why? Because God is offering you a promise that has the power to change your life forever. The promise is this. No matter what your relationship with your earthly dad is like, you have a perfect Father in heaven who loves you and wants to pour out His blessing on you.

The Universal Craving

Session 1

Start

Welcome to session one of *Not Forsaken!*

Let's begin by getting to know one another.

Take a few moments to introduce yourselves. Share your name, members of your immediate families, and where you grew up.

Who's your favorite TV dad, and what makes him your favorite?

As we begin our study together, it's important to recognize that we're coming from different places. All of us have different experiences with our earthly dads—some good, some not so good. But what unites us is the need that's woven into our souls—the need to be loved, treasured, noticed, and accepted by our fathers.

Even if we've experienced a breakdown in our relationship with our earthly dads, it doesn't mean we can't experience a miracle recovery in our relationship with God. Even though we may bear wounds inflicted by our earthly dads, God can restore us and raise us up healed and whole.

Have someone read aloud 2 Corinthians 6:16-18. Then watch Louie's message.

Watch

Use these statements to follow along as you watch the video message.

We all are longing for our father's blessing.

In my research into the lives of some 75 high-achieving, clearly independent women, I knew that I would find a powerful connection between them and the first men in their lives. What surprised me was how deep (and surprisingly traditional) the bond is, how powerful it remains throughout their lives, and how resilient it can be—even when a father has caused it grievous harm. ... No matter how successful their careers, how happy their marriages, or how fulfilling their lives, women told me that their happiness passed through a filter of their fathers' reactions. Many told me that they tried to remove the filter and—much to their surprise—failed. We know that fathers play a key role in the development and choices of their daughters. But even for women whose fathers had been neglectful or abusive, I found a hunger for approval. They wanted a warm relationship with men who did not deserve any relationship at all.¹ —Peggy Drexler

Life for most boys and for many grown men then is a frustrating search for the lost father who has not yet offered protection, provision, nurturing, modeling, or, especially, anointment.²—Frank Pittman

ANOINTMENT: being chosen, being blessed, or being approved

**I will be a Father to you, and you
will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.**

2 CORINTHIANS 6:18

Discuss

Use the following questions to discuss Louie's message.

In what way(s) did you identify with Louie's story about his new nickname from his dad? Or how was it difficult for you to identify with his story?

What word best describes your relationship with your earthly father? Why did you choose that word?

On the video Louie said, "We all are longing for our father's blessing. Every one of us is intrinsically wired with a desire for our father's approval, our father's affection, and our father's participation in our lives. We are starving for it."

How have you found these statements to be true in your life?

Read 2 Corinthians 6:18. Do you think it's possible to relate to God as Father, receiving His approval, affection, and blessing in your life? Why or why not?

What stumbling blocks are keeping you from basking in your Heavenly Father's love for you?

Pray

Close the session with prayer. Remember to complete the following personal studies before the next group session.

Personal Study: Day 1

You Have Worth

Human beings crave approval, especially from our dads. That longing is unquestionably present when we're growing up. We crave our dad's attention and approval when we're kids, and we want so badly to hear him say:

- "That was incredible, Baby Girl!"
- "Wow, Ace [that's what my dad called me]! That was the best dive of all time!"
- "I see you, Princess! Do it again!"
- "Way to go, Son! You're getting so much better!"

Yet—and I'm guessing this statement comes as no surprise—that longing is still there when we're older too, even though it may show up in different, more complex ways. Every one of us is desperate for the approval of our father, no matter what our age. Whether we're doing cartwheels in the living room or presenting proposals in the boardroom, we're looking for approval and affirmation from our dads.

What's the most memorable word of affirmation you've ever received?

What are some ways people might try to gain acceptance and approval?

We're all desperate for our fathers' approval. Without it we can feel given up on, abandoned, deserted, or disowned. We can feel ignored, isolated, jilted, or judged. This void, this lack of a father's presence and approval, can feel like a shadow that always lingers around us, an intangible missing piece we don't know how to find. When that approval isn't present, we feel forsaken.

Our relationship with our dad shapes our sense of acceptance and worth. His influence affects us in multiple ways, but let's consider two polar opposites. On the negative end, a lifetime of hurt or absence from Dad can make us feel that we don't matter—that we're unloved, worthless, or alone. On the positive end, a lifetime of blessing and affirmation from Dad might lead us to think we're the center of someone's universe—that we're relationally sufficient. Both ends of the spectrum affect our sense of identity and worth more than we may think. And the reality is that most of us fall somewhere between the two, a fact that further complicates our outlook on our identity, belonging, and sense of worth.

As you think about your life experience with your dad, which end of the spectrum most closely describes that experience?

Negative Positive Somewhere in the middle

Take a moment to pause and reflect. How would you describe your sense of acceptance and value?

What or who defines your identity? Explain.

These are important questions to consider. Few convictions are more important for human beings than knowing who we are and what defines us. If we don't get our identity right, confusion, struggle, and pain will follow us through life. So before we dive deeper into our relationship with our dad, let's go to the Bible to understand who God says we are and what ultimately defines our worth.

Image Bearers

READ GENESIS 1:26-27; 5:1-3.

What words are repeated in these verses?

In these two passages from Genesis, the word *image* is found four times, while the word *likeness* is found three more. These two terms serve as a foundation for identifying our ultimate worth. To be made in the image or likeness of God means humanity is like God in ways that the rest of the creation isn't. God made the moon and the planets, but they're not designing shuttles to transport anyone there. The mountains reflect the handiwork of God, but they can't describe it. God created all the animals of the land—even the duck-billed platypus—but they're not expounding on quantum physics. But you and me? We're made in the image of God. That means we're image bearers of the one true God. And we're more like our Heavenly Father than we might think.

What emotions do you experience when you consider the fact that you were made in the image of God?

Nothing on earth defines your ultimate identity or personal worth—not your circumstances, not your education, not your socioeconomic level, not your abilities, not your career, not your sexuality, and not even your parents. That means before you ever knew your parents as Mom and Dad (or even if you never knew them at all), you already had inherent worth because you were made in the image and likeness of God.

What identities do you need to let go of in order to take hold of your God-given identity?

His Offspring

Read Acts 17:26-28. Record words or phrases that illustrate our relationship to God and His relationship to us.

What does it tell you about God that He is near to you and eager to find you?

Not Forsaken

When addressing the unbelieving crowd at the Areopagus, the apostle Paul said God relates to us in several different ways.

GOD IS OUR CREATOR. “From one man he made all the nations” (v. 26).

This means God created all human beings, including you.

GOD IS OUR SOVEREIGN LORD. “He marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands” (v. 26). This means God is in ultimate control of everything on earth, including where you were born and raised.

GOD IS OUR SUSTAINER. “In him we live and move and have our being” (v. 28).

This means God isn’t distant from you. He’s literally the source of your life and being at this very moment.

GOD IS OUR FATHER. “We are his offspring” (v. 28). This means God is your Father and you’re His son or daughter.

Yes, God demands worship as your Creator and Lord. And yes, He’s the very ground of your existence. But don’t miss the subtle truth found in verse 28: you’re God’s offspring, His son or daughter (see 2 Cor. 6:18). God is your Father!

Your worth is fixed because you’re an image bearer and the offspring of God. This is good news regardless of your parental circumstances. If you come from a place of blessing and closeness with your dad, a Father exists who’s even greater than he. If you come from a place of pain or neglect, the promise of Scripture is this. No matter what the circumstances are with your earthly dad, you have a perfect Father in heaven who loves you and wants to pour out His blessing on you. The Bible says:

**Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me.**

PSALM 27:10

How should you respond to God for being your perfect Heavenly Father?

Prayer

Father, I confess that I've often found my identity and worth in the people and things around me. I marvel at the fact that I'm made in Your image, and I'm thankful that You've said I'm Your child. Give me grace to wrestle with the hard truths I'll encounter as I work through this study.

Personal Study: Day 2

You Are Known

Meet Brandon. He's a well-liked art major at a state university, where he works hard, makes good grades, and is active in his campus ministry. If you saw him, you'd think he's got it all together and possesses all the blessings a student could ever want. But there's a hidden problem. Brandon comes from a broken home. He never knew his parents as a couple, and he was raised by his grandparents. His childhood years were spent splitting weekends between his mom and his dad. And although no major conflict ever occurred, the relationship between Brandon and his dad has always been distant. He doesn't see his dad more than once a year, and phone calls are sparsely shared. Now a young man entering adulthood, Brandon calls his dad, longing for a deeper relationship. But the conversations never go beyond sports, politics, and the weather. Brandon can't understand why a father wouldn't want to know his son. Introspective and defeated, he muses, *I'm doing so many great things in my life. If only he would get to know me.*

Brandon has grown from being a boy to a man, but he still has a deep longing to be known by his dad, not on the surface level but at the heart level.

Among your family and friends, who knows you best—the real you?

Just as human beings yearn for approval and worth, we also long to be known—and to be deeply known. And when we don't feel that we're known by our parents, we're left feeling isolated or abandoned. Those feelings can then lead to a whole host of responses. We might erect relational walls, refusing to let others in. Or we can go to the other extreme by sharing to a fault without a filter. We were created to know and be known by others, especially our parents.

Some of these questions might be difficult, but don't let the difficulty push you away. Instead, allow them to expose the need in your heart so that you're prepared to receive the answer to that need. We're going to learn today that your longing to be known can be satisfied by God. Whether you have a blessed or an estranged relationship with your dad, you're perfectly known by your Heavenly Father. And it's a deeper knowledge than even the best dad on earth could ever give.

God Knows Everything

Psalm 139 is one of the most personal passages of Scripture in all the Bible. In it we see the depth of God's knowledge of, presence in, and design for our lives. Each way God is involved in our lives is illustrated through a display of who He is.

READ PSALM 139:1-6.

Record the significant details God knows about you.

God is omniscient. Simply put, that means God knows everything—including everything about you! He knows your actions, your ways, your comings and goings, and even all of your words—before they're audibly spoken. Your Heavenly Father knows your deepest thoughts, highest aspirations, and wildest dreams. He's intimately acquainted with all of your victories, struggles, fears, and doubts. The psalmist David was overwhelmed in response to God's deep, personal knowledge of his life.

Why is it good that God knows us personally, truly, and deeply?

God Is Present Everywhere

God isn't defined by space and time. He's literally present everywhere. That means God is omnipresent. He not only knows everything about you, but He's also with you wherever you go.

READ PSALM 139:7-12.

Many of us know what it means for our dad to have missed an important event or to have been at work when we needed him most. Some people experience these absences as isolated events in the midst of an otherwise blessed existence. Others know these as the norm. The psalmist David proclaimed the good news that your Heavenly Father never misses an important date. He never fails to show up. And He will never leave you or forsake you (see Heb. 13:5).

According to Psalm 139:7-12, why should it comfort you to know that God is always with you?

God Is All-Powerful

In addition to being all-knowing and ever-present, God is all-powerful. He's omnipotent. You can see His power on full display in the next section of Psalm 139, illustrated in the intricate ways He created you.

READ PSALM 139:13-16.

Reflect on the way God intricately and personally designed your body and your life. Record any words or phrases from these verses that you find especially meaningful.

You may have inherited your grandfather's nose or your mother's laugh, but your Heavenly Father ultimately designed, created, and gave the gift of life to you. This means no one knows you like your Creator. No matter the joys or sorrows you've experienced with your earthly father, your Heavenly Father knows you, accompanies you, and fashions you as no other father can.

Precious Promise

Next David reflected on the continual, vast thoughts of God toward His children.

READ PSALM 139:17-18.

Here's the liberating truth to grasp and hold on to as you go through life: your Heavenly Father knows you. He's with you always. And He will never abandon you or let you down. Just as you're known by God, He also wants to be known. Jesus said knowing God is the ultimate meaning of life:

**This is eternal life: that they know
you, the only true God, and Jesus
Christ, whom you have sent.**

JOHN 17:3

Simply going to heaven when we die isn't the goal of the Christian life. Jesus tells us that the ultimate end to which all of existence points is for us to know God. All of your life—from the time you give your life to Jesus and continuing throughout eternity—should be characterized by a deepening knowledge of and love for your Heavenly Father.

Prayer

Father, You're all-knowing, all-powerful,
and present everywhere. I marvel at Your
works, and I'm humbled by the vast sum
of Your precious thoughts toward me.
Give me grace to be satisfied by Your
presence in my life now and forever.

Personal Study: Day 3

You Have Meaning

Why am I here? This is quite possibly the most important question a human being could ever ask. Because God has uniquely and personally created each of us, human life demands value, meaning, and purpose. We're all looking for meaning in one form or another. And Americans usually identify family as the primary place in which we find meaning and purpose.

In a survey conducted by Pew Research Center, almost 70 percent of American adults identified the family as the central place where meaning is found. That's 3½ times more than the number who listed spirituality and faith.³ We can't disregard the degree to which our family affects our sense of meaning and purpose.

What are some other areas in which people might look to find meaning and purpose in life?

You Aren't an Accident

This week you've already seen that God intentionally and personally created you. These truths present an important principle you should never forget: you aren't an accident. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding your conception, God planned to create you. And what He planned in His mind, He brought to fruition with His creative hands. Whether you and your parents are close or even if you don't know one or both of them at all, you aren't an accident. If you're alive on planet Earth right now, it's because your Heavenly Father wanted you to be here.

What happens in our hearts and souls when we see ourselves as being an accident? What shifts when we begin to grasp that God made each of us with purpose?

Family is an amazing gift from God. And like all gifts, we should receive our families with hearts of gratitude. But we should never enjoy the gifts more than the Giver. We should never place any gift from God on a higher pedestal than God Himself. Even though our families can be a great source of enjoyment and encouragement, they should never be our source of ultimate fulfillment or purpose. Then where do you find them? Why are you here? That's where God comes in.

Ultimate Meaning in Life

READ ISAIAH 43:6-7.

What words did God use in these verses to refer to His people?

According to these verses, what's the purpose for which God creates us?

Not Forsaken

God says He creates all of His sons and daughters for His glory. That word *all* includes you. God has wired each of us with unique abilities, aptitudes, and desires. Our reason for being is to know and love our Maker and to enjoy Him forever. Nothing is more important than that core purpose. Yet within our relationship with God, He tailors us to make unique contributions to His work in the world, giving our individual lives very specific meaning and direction.

You may come from a healthy, loving family, but without a relationship with your Heavenly Father, you'll miss the purpose of your life. The converse is also true. Even if you suffer from dysfunction, abuse, or loss in your family, you can still experience ultimate meaning in life. It's available to all through God's perfect Son, Jesus Christ.

READ ROMANS 3:23.

How does sin keep us from living out the purpose for which God created us?

Read Jesus' words in John 17:4. What makes Jesus completely different from us?

How does entering a life-changing relationship with Jesus allow us to honor and glorify God the way we're designed to?

God created us with worth and purpose, but sin thwarts our purpose and distorts our understanding of ourselves. Because of sin, none of us glorify God the way He intended. We were all created for God's glory, but we all fall short of it. That means by ourselves we can't fulfill the reason for which God created us. Jesus came to earth to live the perfect life we were required to live and die the punishing death we were required to die in order to make a way for us to fulfill God's purpose for our lives. While we fall short of the glory of God, Jesus perfectly glorified God on earth. Jesus is the means for us to experience ultimate meaning in life.

So What Now?

No one is born into the family of God. Adoption into His family comes through His Son, Jesus. In His own words Jesus tells us how we can enter God's family:

**“The time has come,” he said.
“The kingdom of God has come near.
Repent and believe the good news!”**

MARK 1:15

Not Forsaken

Jesus summed up the good news of how to be adopted into God's family with two requirements.

1. Turn away from your sin. This means confessing to God that you're a sinner who fails to glorify Him with your life. It also means turning away from your life of sin (repenting) and starting to walk in obedience to God.
2. Trust in Jesus Christ, believing by faith that He lived the perfect life you were required to live and died the death you were required to die. Believe that just as He rose from the grave on the third day, He will give eternal life to all who place their faith in Him.

Can you point to a time in your life when you were adopted into the family of God through repentance and faith? If so, when?

If not, do you want to be adopted now? If so, pray to your Heavenly Father, confess your sin, and ask Jesus to save you or reach out to a trusted friend or pastor to help you act on that decision.

When you place your faith in Jesus, God adopts you into a new family with a new purpose and meaning. The Bible says:

To all who did receive him
[Jesus], to those who believed
in his name, he gave the right
to become children of God.

JOHN 1:12

Once you understand who gives you worth, who knows you, and who defines your purpose, you can take your first steps to receive your Heavenly Father's blessing and to confront any regrets over your relationship with your earthly father.

Prayer

Father, thank You for creating me with purpose and for adopting me into Your eternal family through Your Son, Jesus. Please open my heart to believe the truths of Your Word as I continue this study.

1. Peggy Drexler, "Daughters and Dad's Approval," *Psychology Today*, June 27, 2011, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/our-gender-ourselves/201106/daughters-and-dads-approval>.
2. Frank Pittman, "Fathers and Sons," *Psychology Today*, September 1, 1993, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/199309/fathers-and-sons>.
3. "Where Americans Find Meaning in Life," Pew Research Center, November 20, 2018, <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/11/20/where-americans-find-meaning-in-life/>.

Reflect

What did you learn from this week's study that you didn't know before?

In what sources other than God are you tempted to find ultimate meaning in life?

If someone asked you, "What defines your identity, value, and worth?" how would you respond after completing this week's study?

Connect

In this study we're going to tackle some deep truths and challenging issues. Dealing with challenges is best done with others. Make a commitment to faithfully attend each group session and to complete all of the personal studies.

Reach out to a fellow group member and ask how you can specifically pray for him or her in the coming week.

Record a prayer for fellow group members in the space provided.