



## Contrasting Impaired Human Parents with Our Heavenly Parent

*Adapted from Into Abba's Arms by Sandra D. Wilson, Ph.D. (Tyndale House)*

The first three numbers in the left column describe experiences that are often part of performance-oriented, shame-based families. Numbers four through six list some traits common to those raised in these families. The right column highlights corresponding differences in God and in His ways with His children.

In the column on the left, circle the experiences and traits you identify as part of your childhood or adult life. How would your living and relating to God and to others be different if you deeply believed, personally experienced, and consistently lived out the truths described in the column on the right?

Our Impaired Human Parents	Our Perfect Heavenly Parent
1) <u>Unrealistic expectations</u> , e.g., expecting a child of 6 to act 12, or acting shocked when a child does not behave or perform perfectly.	1) God knows our limitations, so He has no unrealistic expectations (Ps.103:13-14). And Jesus "knew what was in man." (John 2:25.)
2) <u>An External focus</u> and performance orientation to life is modeled by parents and learned by children.	2) God consistently emphasizes an internal perspective by focusing on the condition of our hearts. E.g., see I Sam.16:7; Pro. 4:23; Joel 2:13; Mark 7:21-23.
3) Emotional Abandonment, i.e. hands on abuse, or parents withdraw affection/tenderness because a child disappoints their expectations or because they're incapable of emotional closeness.	3) God promises He will never abandon His children even if their earthly parents do. See Ps. 27:10. And Jesus, our Emmanuel, i.e., God with us (Matt. 1:23), promises He will not leave us orphans in John 14:18.
4) <u>A Sense of Shame</u> , i.e., believing that "I have a hopelessly fatal flaw that others don't have."	4) God sees all of us as equally sinful. See Rom. 3:23. The gospel is <u>so</u> democratic; it says we're all a mess!
5) <u>Attempts to earn acceptance</u> , approval and love. i.e., shift from BEING to DOING as the basis for establishing and maintaining relationships.	5) God repeatedly tells His children that He relates to them not because of their good deeds, but because of His unearned love and mercy. (See Romans 5:8.)
6) <u>Feelings of never being fully accepted</u> by loved authority figures (parents, etc.) because nothing is ever quite good enough.	6) God fully accepts us "in [His] Beloved [Son]" according to Ephesians 1:6 (KJV).



**REMEMBER:** In all parent-child relationships, the parent's value system and character, not the behavior of the child, determine the child's degree of acceptance. In other words, the relationship is more a statement about the parent than the child. Clearly, we see this truth in the relationship with our Heavenly Father. (For example, see Deuteronomy 7:7-9 and Romans 5:8.)

God accepts us because of what Jesus has done, not because of anything we can do. This does not change no matter how long we've been Christians (see Col. 2:6). When Jesus invites us to abide in Him in John 15, in effect He tells us to make Him our dwelling place, not just our launching pad into the Christian life. For as the songwriter says, "Only by grace do we enter. Only by grace do we stand." We may outgrow mumps, measles and zits, but we never outgrow our human weakness and need to rely totally upon the redeeming grace of God!

**TO LEARN MORE. READ:**

*The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Multnomah) and *Abba's Child* (Navpress) by Brennan Manning

*Love Beyond Reason* by John Ortberg (Zondervan)

*Into Abba's Arm: Finding the Acceptance You're Always Wanted* (Tyndale) by Sandra D. Wilson, and

*Released From Shame* (InterVarsity Press) by Sandra D. Wilson