

July 15. Read 2 Timothy 1:3-7. At a key point in *The Lion King*, Simba's watery reflection becomes the image of his father. Rafiki says, "You see? He lives in you." That's a very Biblical idea. The apostle Paul traced his faith to his ancestors (verse 3). Here he called his friend Timothy to live out his own legacy of faith from his mother and grandmother, and from Paul, his spiritual "father." Your family may or may not have been Christians, but the church family's roots go back nearly 2,000 years (with Hebrew roots even older). How does that history guide and shape you as a Christ follower? What positive things have you learned from mentors in the faith? How has even the brokenness in your mentors' lives helped you see more fully the human condition and the need we all have for God's grace? Throughout 2 Timothy, Paul taught Timothy about leading others. We're called not only to take in the faith of our ancestors and mentors, but to be "spiritual ancestors" to others. In whose life (family, friends, and work associates) can you invest by nurturing their faith?

July 16. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-12, 20-25. When we are young, we often resist listening to and learning from parents or other "aged" guardians. But one of God's central charges to Israelite parents (and to parents ever since), was "teach your children." Faithful fathers and mothers patiently guide their children, just as Mufasa patiently (and, it sometimes seemed, pointlessly!) taught Simba in *The Lion King*. Verses 8-9 ("Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses") are the basis for rituals Orthodox Jews follow to this day. What habits have you built that help you always keep God's principles for life in focus? What is one spiritual practice you've wanted to try, but haven't? Would this summer be a good time to see if it deepens your walk with God? Verses 10-12 warned Israel that they'd be tempted to forget about God when they were affluent and all was going well. Does this tend to be true for you, too? In a culture obsessed with "the economy," how do you keep God central in your life?

July 17. Read Titus 3:3-8. Virtually every pastor has had a version of Rafiki's talk with Simba in *The Lion King*. Simba says, "You can't change the past," but what he really means is, "Because of the past, I can't change the future." The letter to Titus carried the hope-filled essence of the Christian good news: God's "kindness and love" offer us "rebirth and renewal," no matter what our past. What's your story? Is there a point in your past (even your recent past) which you readily identify as "foolish, disobedient, deceived," or are you more in the "I've always been a pretty good person" camp? Do people in both groups need God's mercy for rebirth and renewal? When have you been most clearly aware of God's mercy toward you? In *The Lion King* Simba was the true king, not because he led an ideal life, but because of whose son he was. We're called "heirs having the hope of eternal life" (verse 7; see also Galatians 3:29, Romans 8:15-17). How can this royal imagery that calls you God's child, and an heir with Christ, give you confidence in your walk with God?

July 18. Read Luke 15:11-24. Jesus told this story to “tax collectors and sinners,” people who had given up on God. Why not? They thought God had given up on them, and the “church people” they knew criticized Jesus for even talking to them (see Luke 15:1-2). But Jesus drew a picture of an eternal Father who is always waiting to joyously welcome home any wandering child. The phrase “burning your bridges behind you” came from generals who wanted their soldiers to see no chance of retreat if they lost a battle. Now it often stands for ruined relationships. Are you near God or far away? If far, what’s blocking you from “going home”? In light of Jesus’ story, can you picture God waiting with open arms for you? The Lion King includes amusing scenes in which Simba, in exile, learns to eat (but never quite enjoy) grubs with his new friends. In Jesus’ story, the son ended up wishing for some of the hogs’ food. When You’re close to hitting bottom, inwardly hungry, how can God’s gentle call on your life offer you fresh hope, new purpose and deep peace?

July 19. Read Matthew 7:7-12, Luke 11:9-13. In The Lion King, Mufasa promised his son Simba that he would always be there. But he could not (at least in a physical, earthly sense) keep that pledge. Jesus taught that we can only fully learn the ultimate meaning of “father” from God. God’s fatherly love, Jesus said, runs farther and deeper than the love of even the best human fathers can—and it WILL always be there. As we ponder Jesus’ words, they trigger an awareness that we often define “good” differently than God does. Have you ever seen a child who strongly wants something (e.g. a fourth ice cream cone) that the child’s father knows would not be good for the child? How does this shape your understanding of what Jesus promised us? Psalm 68:5 called God a “father to the fatherless,” and added that “God sets the lonely in families.” Was your human father a warm, close person for you, or a more distant, or even hurtful, figure? In what ways does Jesus’ image of God as an ever-present, fully reliable father speak to your heart? How have you experienced God’s fatherly love?

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