



STREETLIGHT BELIEFS PT 1:

What makes someone a “human being”?

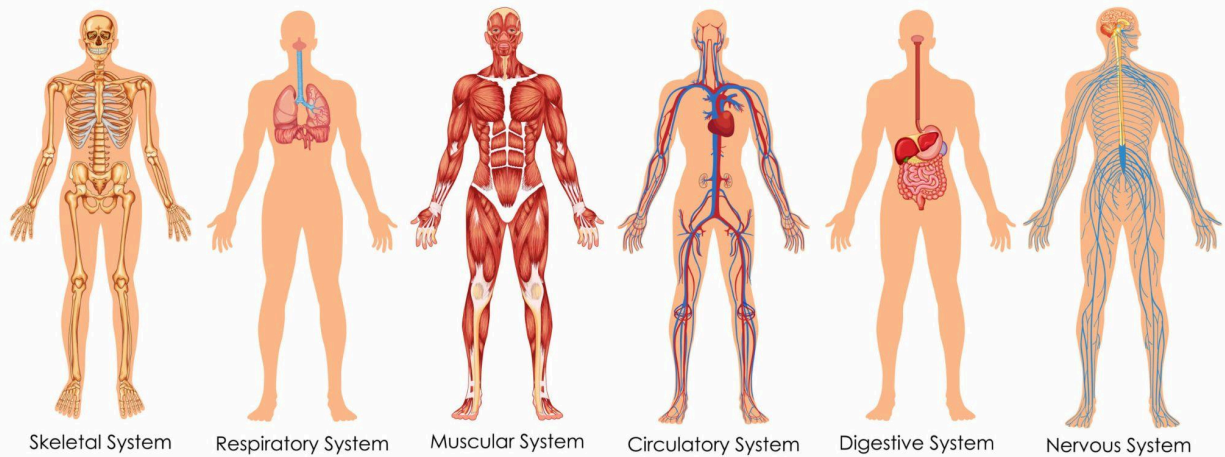
Dictionary.com defines a “human being” as:

noun

1. *any individual of the genus Homo, especially a member of the species Homo sapiens.*
2. *a person, especially as distinguished from other animals or as representing the human species¹*

¹ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/human-being>

Human Body Organ Systems



If we look at the image above, we see that, in a scientific sense, every human being is made up of a skeletal, respiratory, muscular, circulatory, digestive, and nervous system. It's fair to say that these are primary things that make up a human being. One could be a human being and have issues in one or more of these systems, but essentially, all need to be functional for a human being to exist and function themselves.

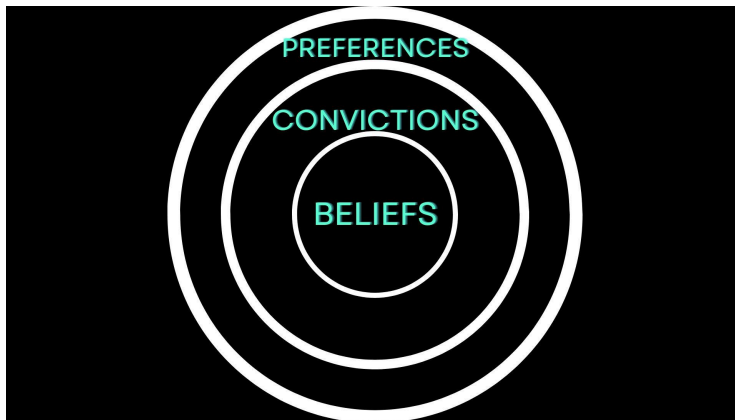
It could be fairly said that skeletal, respiratory, muscular, circulatory, digestive, and nervous systems are **primary** aspects of what it is to be a human being.



Things like skin color, eye color, hair color, hair type, body shape, height and weight also are unique aspects of what it means to be a human being. However, those could be called **secondary** aspects of being human. All people, of all skin colors, eye colors, hair colors, hair types, body shapes, heights and weights all share skeletal, respiratory, muscular, circulatory, digestive, and nervous systems in common. The primary aspects

of being human are what unite humans, while the secondary differences of being human have either the potential to divide us, or unite us in our diversity.

With all that to say, I'm about to endeavor into a very difficult subject over the next three weeks. I'm going to attempt to define what Streetlight Community Church believes. This is a daunting thing to do! Why? Because it's so difficult for us as followers of Jesus to separate the things of primary importance from things of secondary importance. In fact, it's even difficult for many of us to sort out our preferences from what our convictions and beliefs are.



I find this graph helpful. It was mentioned by pastor Jonathan Schaeffer in a sermon that he gave at Grace Church of the Christian Missionary Alliance in Middleburg Heights, Ohio. It helps us to mentally and emotionally separate our preferences, convictions, and beliefs. Again, this is no easy task! It requires the Holy Spirit's aide. It requires faith. It requires spiritual, mental and emotional maturity!

What are preferences when it comes to being followers of Jesus in the Church? Preferences are things like worship music style, preaching style, the way we do communion, the style of a Church community, the way we dress, whether we like hip hop or not, whether we like acoustic music or not, whether we like a certain discipleship curriculum or not. Multiple curriculums can be biblical and good but we can prefer one over the other, right?

We all have preferences in our day to day lives. We like one coffee shop more than another, one restaurant more than another, one style of clothing more than another, certain types of personalities more than others. Our preferences apply to where we work, shop, eat, rest, and play! They drive our lives very much, especially in a consumer culture. We must always be aware of how our preferences can inform our faith. We must beware of how our preferences can *infect* our faith!

Preferences obviously come into play when people assess my role as the leader of Streetlight Community Church. I get a front row seat to many preferences of many types of people- you can believe me. I have preferences of my own that I'm working to bring under the Lordship of Jesus.

But what does it mean to lead Streetlight well? I can't help but think of a joke about this, that states:

The perfect pastor preaches exactly 25 minutes.

They condemn sin roundly but never hurt anyone's feelings.

They work from 8 AM until midnight and are also the church janitor.

The perfect pastor makes \$400 a week, wears good clothes, drives a good car, buys good books, and donates \$300 a week to the church.

They are 29 years old and have 40 years experience.

Above all, they are good looking.

The perfect pastor has a burning desire to work with teenagers, and they spend most of their time with the senior citizens.

They smile all the time with a straight face because they have a sense of humor that keeps them seriously dedicated to their church.

They make 15 home visits a day and are always in their office to be handy when needed.

The perfect pastor always has time for the church council and all of its committees.

They never miss a meeting of any church organization, or civic organization, and are always busy evangelizing the unchurched.

The perfect pastor is always in the next church over!²

This joke highlights the fact that many followers of Jesus **bombard** pastoral leaders with their preferences. I've done it too. And then I became a lead pastor at Streetlight back in September of 2019, and over time, sequentially apologized to every lead pastor that I had ever done it to!

The point is that no human being alive can satisfy all the preferences of people, and as a pastor of Streetlight for the past 4 & ½ years I can certainly testify to this!

And I'll tell you, that at Streetlight we really do believe in trying to stay diverse in our expressions! We desire to engage a variety of people's preferences with the hope of drawing people into discipleship, mission, and ever growing spiritual maturity in Christ. Musically we do hip hop, CCM, gospel, folky stuff, hymns, rock and more in our worship music. Some think our worship is too loud, some love it loud, and it depends on who is

² <https://www.angelfire.com/in4/thelighthouse/humor/xianjokes.html>

running the soundboard! We are truly trying to reflect the fact that within a 5 mile radius, we are in a half black and half white area of Akron, Ohio, and we want elements of black Church and white Church to exist alongside each other in the style of preaching and worship.

But I'll tell you, we'll never satisfy everybody's preferences. And we're fine with that. It's an impossible endeavor. There are many expressions of the Body of Christ out there and we praise God that none of them are exactly the same.

But then we have the next layer of the circles, **convictions**.

Convictions are things that are very important to us as Christ followers that we hold dearly, but not necessarily everyone is in the same place as us. And not all convictions are prerequisites for being a legitimate follower of Christ.

For example, I have deep convictions about remaining simple and non-materialistic in my lifestyle, so even if my wife and I were to all of a sudden win the lottery, or double the salaries we make, by His grace I sincerely hope I would continue to drive Toyotas and Nissans, and shop at thrift stores for clothes. I wouldn't want to upgrade our house, I'd probably just want to fix all of the stuff that's jacked up in it- particularly our attic. Ideally, I would want to pay off all of our bills, keep a simple middle class lifestyle, then bless the snot out of some really specific organizations and people that my family and I prayerfully decide to support.

I have the conviction that I should read scripture daily. I don't always do it. I have the conviction that I should fast regularly. I don't always do it. I have the conviction that I need to cultivate a prayer life. I have good seasons of it and weaker seasons of it. I have the personal conviction that I should be in Sunday worship with other believers every week unless I'm deathly ill, and have practiced that rhythm and discipline for twenty two years since I first came to faith. Because of being so consistent in that area I've struggled with legalism towards other Christ followers in their Sunday attendance that I am continually repenting of! I have the personal conviction that I should be in a discipleship group that I pour into, and also in a discipleship group where I'm being poured into. I have the personal conviction that I should always have a "Paul" in my life that is mentoring me in Christ, and a "Timothy" in my life that I am mentoring. I have the conviction that I should always be giving at least 10% of my family's income to the Church.

However, I've learned through the course of time and gradually being sanctified and matured in Christ, that though I have these convictions, I can't impose them on others. I

can share them with others. I can inspire others towards them. I can point out why my deep study in God's Word has led me to these things, but can't make others engage in the behaviors and actions.

I also have deeply held convictions about women and men in ministry and the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ followers that have come as a result of much study in God's Word and prayer. And we'll get to that stuff eventually in this series. Specifically we'll talk about it on the third week so stay tuned!

But my convictions about how to engage my own materialism, the frequency of bible reading, prayer, giving, and fasting that a disciple should engage in, commitment to worship gatherings and discipleship groups, commitment to mentoring and being mentored, and understanding of the role of men, women and the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer are not necessarily entirely related to my core beliefs about who God, the Son and the Holy Spirit are as revealed in the Word. They are certainly intertwined. They can certainly be confused with one another. However, there are core beliefs that make up the core of what it means to be a core Christ follower!

And these beliefs are primary like the skeletal, respiratory, muscular, circulatory, digestive, and nervous systems of human beings. They should unite human beings made in the image of God under their Creator God and Savior Jesus. People have as different of secondary convictions as they have different skin colors, eye colors, hair colors, hair types, body shapes, heights and weights, but they're still human. Human beings differ in their specific physical characteristics, but all have the physical components of being human. Christ followers differ on secondary convictions, but unite in primary convictions. Imagine a Church where we actually practiced this and didn't divide and hate one another based on non-primary issues! Hard to imagine in our culture but with the Spirit of Christ, I'm certain it's possible!

No doubt it can also be said that Christ followers can differ on what the primary convictions need to be. We have every extreme we could imagine in our day, as well as many people who find themselves in the middle! We've got theologically liberal, mainline, and progressive Christians as well as having theologically conservative, fundamentalist Christians and everything in between.

Let me share now what the primary convictions of Streetlight Community Church, as revealed in our articles of faith, are.

We had these articles of faith passed down from the Chapel in Akron, which birthed us as a Church back in April of 2016 as "The Chapel in Kenmore". They are, with some

language unique to them, reflective of the basic Nicene Creed tenets of traditional, ancient, orthodox Christian doctrine that have existed for two millenia. Granted there are nuanced differences in the ways that these things can be worded, and there are sometimes secondary convictions that can creep their way in. But we hope to reflect a very basic, orthodox view of Christ and the Scriptures in our community, and continue to lovingly defend and hold those things dearly!

Doctrine like this is beautiful. It's meant, like the total eclipse was, to inspire awe and wonder at our mighty, amazing God. Let's allow these precepts pulled from the scriptures to inspire us towards worship, not to be read like a wooden, dead theological treatise! Let's dive into them:

1. At Streetlight, we believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are fully inspired of God and inerrant in the original writings, and that they are of supreme and final authority.

Now we're not saying that there haven't been scribal errors in the preservation and translation of the scriptures throughout the centuries. But we're also saying that the preservation of the original biblical texts are factually and historically unprecedented in their accuracy.

Nerd out with me for a moment on excerpts from these apologeticspress.com and medium.com articles on the subject of the Bible's reliability:

According to *How Firm A Foundation*, "Here is how the Jewish scribes handled the manuscripts. According to Jewish tradition, after Ezra the scribe finished writing II Chronicles, he compiled the canonical books and formed a school of scribes to be the guardians of the texts. As time went by the scribes developed an elaborate system of tests to make sure their work was accurate. For example:

1. They noted the words that occurred only once in the bible and if the word appeared somewhere else in a later copy the scribe knew that there had been a mistake.
2. The scribes also kept track of the letters and the words in each book. For each book they knew the middle word and letter and they even knew how many times each letter occurred.
3. After finishing a book they would check their work and if it did not pass, and they could not find the mistake they made, then they would destroy or shred the copy and start all over. (Imagine having to do that for the long books of Isaiah or Jeremiah!).

processes to preserve his word. Sadly though, many have cited these minor useless grammar issues as an excuse to avoid the bible and God's truth to mankind.⁴

The original books written by the Apostles and Prophets are called Autographs. The Autographs are no longer with us and have either disappeared or been destroyed. We do however have the manuscripts, which are handwritten copies of copies of copies that have survived over the centuries.

There are thousands of manuscripts and each manuscript is imperfect. There is always more than one copy, and each copy has differences. Textual Criticism is a complicated field of study that deals with these manuscripts by analyzing and comparing their differences. It is important to note before going any further that not all criticism is negative. Criticism is basically the act of comparing one thing to another and making an evaluation. We tend to think of criticism negatively, and textual critics have been accused of passing judgment on the bible. However that is not what their profession deals with. A textual critic tries to figure out what the author of the autograph actually wrote; by comparing and analyzing the manuscripts. That is their goal. We are very blessed to have textual critics who use their time studying these things for us.⁵

Now, with all of that information in mind, I can't help but put my trust in the Word of God. I'm coming from a place of an agnostic upbringing where I was quite literally taught to question everything and reject the Church as a corrupted institution. It was through my study of all ancient literature including the Bible that led me to believe in the Bible's reliability. I originally came at the subject of the scriptural canon with skepticism, thinking that the canon was developed by corrupted, power hungry, money hungry, chauvinistic patriarchs who wanted to oppress culture and force people into blind moral obedience. I realized after delving into the subject that the greatest preservers of the biblical canon were actually persecuted for their faith, and were in the line of being disciplined by people who actually walked with Christ while He was on earth. One great example of that is Irenaeus, who was disciplined by Polycarp, who was disciplined by the apostle John. Irenaeus was a very significant voice in the establishing of the biblical canon.

Plus, there was another thing I couldn't personally shake when I came to faith. I was studying archaeology and history in a Religion Studies minor at Kent State University in Ohio from 2001-2005, and **accidentally** coming under the Lordship of Christ (though it was no accident in the spiritual realm! Just a mistake according to KSU's religion department!). I came to faith, began meditating on scripture regularly, and realized through personal experience that *the word of God is living and effective and sharper*

⁴ <https://medium.com/@joshuaedge/the-preservation-of-gods-word-6c1e95bfb6d0>

⁵ <https://medium.com/@joshuaedge/the-preservation-of-gods-word-6c1e95bfb6d0>

than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)

I read the scriptures regularly thanks to folks discipling me early on in my faith, and I was radically transformed by them. Hebrews 4:12 came true! I would read the same verses chapters over and over, even on different days. The Lord would speak to my heart and mind differently and encounter me with His presence! This is something that the unbelieving world will never understand! I can say that twenty two years later, after going through the entire Old and New Testaments many times and marinating on them more and more slowly, this reality has only increased for me! I'm so grateful for the living, active, powerful Word of God!

While in His resurrected state, Jesus appeared to His disciples bodily and He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:45) People that truly know Jesus know this shift that has happened in them! They know personally and experientially that *no prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of mankind; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet. 1:20-21)* When we have the Holy Spirit living and alive, breathing life and truth into us, the scriptures as well, come alive. Also, we, by the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, clearly see that *all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness. (2 Tim. 3:16)*

People can claim to believe in Jesus, but if they have an aversion to reading the Bible regularly, there's something seriously defunct there. Followers of Christ truly flourish when they are regularly in the Scriptures. Every statistic that exists points to that fact! Dig into His Word beloved!

So yes, we're saying that ***at Streetlight, we believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are fully inspired of God and inerrant in the original writings, and that they are of supreme and final authority.*** My main prayer while in my sacred time in the scriptures is "Holy Spirit, reveal to me what you're saying to me through the Word! You're the best interpreter of it! Reveal Your truth to me!" Pray the same prayer regularly with me while you're in the Word y'all!

Let's delve into the next article of faith;

2. We believe in one God, eternally existing in three Persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three in one, co-equal, which is the Trinity.

All analogies that we've tried to use to explain the Trinity fall short of attempting to explain its mind-blowing significance.

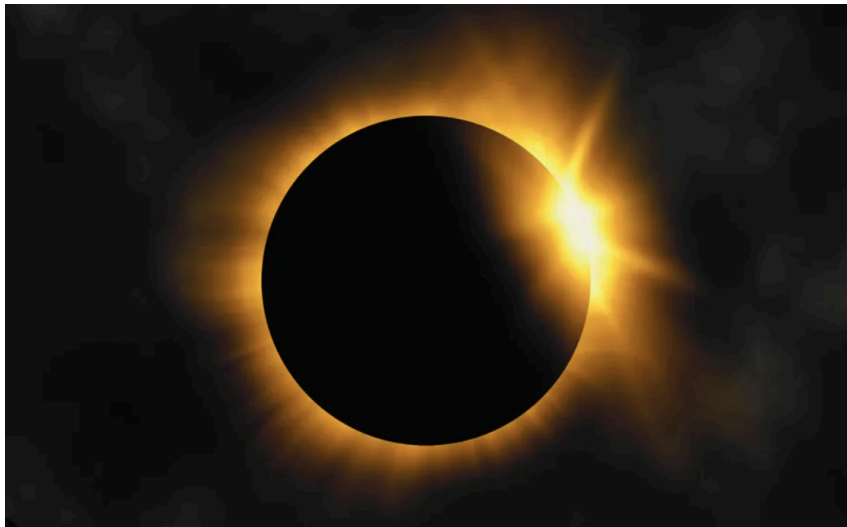
The Athanasian Creed states it well, "We worship one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence."⁶

We usually try to explain the mind-blowing truth of the Trinity by saying things like;

- God is kind of like water which can be ice, liquid and steam. Or,
- God is kind of like a man who is a father, a son and an uncle, or,
- God is kind of like a three-leaf clover, or a triangle; one object, but three different, identifiable leaves, or sides, or
- God is like an egg– the Father the shell, the egg whites the Son, and the yolk the Spirit.

But all of these fall short because they tend to emphasize that the Trinity is blending the persons of the Godhead in the first three analogies, or in the case of the egg analogy, that the Trinity is in some sense, dividing the essence of God. Again the Athanasian statement on the Trinity is helpful.

So do you know what kind of analogy I can give to explain the Trinity?



Think back to April 9th, 2024. Where were you when the solar eclipse happened over Akron, Ohio?

⁶ <https://www.youthworks.net/articles/analogies-of-the-trinity>

I was personally in a large field right by my house in Akron. When the eclipse happened, everyone was screaming, clapping and yelling in amazement. I was doing the same. I was with my three daughters, sitting on a blanket, eating Takis with glasses on. We were blown away and in awe. I started crying because I was so overwhelmed by the presence of the Creator in His Creation.

And we can explain what scientifically happened during the eclipse much better than we can explain the Trinity. For a solar eclipse, the moon is between the sun and the Earth. This means that the Earth is in the shadow of the moon. Therefore, from the Earth, we see the moon blocking the sun.⁷

However, the scientific explanation doesn't do any justice to the awe and amazement that viewing such a thing produces in the human mind, heart and body! The scientific explanation is objective truth, but the subjective experience of the solar eclipse was a whole other thing!

Maybe this is how amazing it would have fully been to witness the baptism of Jesus from a simultaneously earthly and heavenly viewpoint! At the baptism of Jesus, all three persons of the Trinity were activated and aligned much like the earth, moon and sun from the viewpoint of an Akronite was on April 9th, 2024!

When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased." (Matt. 3:16-17)

Unlike a solar eclipse, we can't fully explain the Trinity, but those who are in intimate relationship with the Godhead know it's real. We know that God, the Son and the Spirit have always existed eternally, and were there at the creation of the heavens and the earth (John 1:1-5). We also know that God the Father sent His Son Jesus down to earth and that Jesus, echoing the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4, claimed right in the hearing of the center of Israel that "He and the Father were one." (John 10:30) We also know that when Jesus promised the sending of the person of the Holy Spirit to quite literally live in His disciples after His death and resurrection, that He said; (The Holy Spirit) will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you. Everything the Father has is mine. This is why I told you that he takes from what is mine and will declare it to you. (John 16:14-15)

⁷ <https://www.usi.edu/solarpaloosa/educational-resources/science-of-the-eclipses>

So all three persons of the Trinity exist, and they all have an equally important ministry in the lives of us as followers of Christ. We'll get more into their functions as we continue through our articles of faith.

Let's delve into the third article of faith;

3. *We believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, who has blessed His children with every spiritual blessing. He adopts as His own all those who come to Him through His Son, and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own.*

When I think of the idea of adoption, I can't help but think of so many people in the neighborhood where I get to do ministry who have fostered and adopted kids. Many of these kids came out of home situations where it was toxic, abusive and unsafe, and then were brought into loving homes of people who brought them in, fed them, clothed them, and most importantly, lavished the love, forgiveness, and grace of Jesus on them.

Now we could heavily get into all the scriptures on the heart of God the Father for the fatherless. I could share how God's heart for the fatherless has led me to take action in mentoring young men in the city of Akron, and how it's led to the birthing of a hip hop program and me having a hip hop studio in my office. I could add that because I connect best with kids through music, producing hip hop ended up being a missionary endeavor for me to connect me with many young men in many different places spiritually who simply need an ear, need encouragement, need a fan, and need support! And this has led some of these individuals to come to know Jesus Christ!

But the impetus for us being fathers and mothers to the fatherless, at any level or any capacity, is the Father's heart for us, who, before meeting Jesus, were spiritual orphans! Just look at Romans 8:14-17!

14 For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!" 16 The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, 17 and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:14-17)

We need to know that these scriptures spoke to both men and women and said that because of Christ, we were all elevated to the status of coheirs in the sight of God. In the first century culture, a first born son tended to receive the inheritance of the Father. Because of Christ, we are all equally co heirs with Christ in the blessings and presence

of the Father! And notice- it will lead to suffering with Him, and being glorified with Him! This status in the sight of God, bought by Christ, can lead us to stand in the face of fear, demonic attack, spiritual bondage, and the deathly words of the enemy over our lives and identities, and have God breathe eternal confidence in the face of it all! Praise His Name!

God wants to adopt you! I was talking to a friend of mine who doesn't know his Father, got abused by his mother, ended up living with his grandmother, and experienced various kinds of abuse at the hands of others in his upbringing. God says to that friend just as He says to you, "Let me father you, because I am a perfect, holy, loving, truthful, reliable, caring, forgiving, merciful, trustworthy, joy giving, life giving Abba!" Abba means "Daddy". God loves you more than you can fathom right now. Your story, your upbringing, your circumstances, your struggles, your mistakes, your failures, your difficulties, your ailments, your sins may make you think otherwise. You may have had a garbage Dad who didn't give a rip about you. God comes into the middle of all that mess and calls you his beloved Son, His beloved daughter. The one for whom Christ gave His life and ransomed you! He is a perfect Father and He's wildly in pursuit of a relationship with you! Trust Him!