

THIRD PLACE:

Bitterness Gone

by John Krueger



I was looking at a photo album. As I paged through it I was struck by a picture of my dad on the sun porch of my childhood home. He was holding a baby and looking at the camera with a big grin on his face. He looked thrilled, the picture of delight. I contemplated the picture, wondering exactly what was going on, and then realized the baby was I and this was the day of my baptism.

I sadly said out loud, “Look at this picture. What happened?”

I think the problem was mainly that Dad did not understand compliments nor encouragement. He did understand discipline, which was fine, and criticism, which was not. In a sociology book I came across a chapter entitled, “German Fathers.” I read this with amazement, saying over and over again, “This is my dad!”

One time it was summer. I was about 15. I was home alone. Without being asked I cleaned the garage, including moving everything and hosing it out. I thought, “This time Daddy will be really happy and give me a compliment.”

When he and Mom came home, they had packages in their arms. I said, “Daddy -- look at the garage, I cleaned it!” His only response was “Did you do the basement too?”

And that’s how it was.

Leaving for my junior year of college, I went in to say good bye to my dad. He hugged me and said, “I love you kids so much, I wish you would love me.” Confused, I went away.

The years went by with me not liking my dad. We, of course,

were cordial, maybe even loving, but I got very tired of him telling me (an adult, pastor, father) what to do. Once I tried to get our relationship straightened out, but even that didn't go well. Sure wish he were here now that I'm old enough to know a few things. Then . . .

It was at a pastor's prayer summit. The leaders instructed us, "This morning the prayers will all begin, 'I love You, Lord, because . . .'"

There was among us a cool guy, sort of eccentric. This morning he prayed, "I love You, Lord, because You gave me my father. Oh, he wasn't a very good father, he was a drunk and he beat me. But he was the best daddy he knew how to be."

Halfway through this the tears were running down my face. I said to myself, "My dad wasn't a drunk, and my dad didn't beat me. And my dad too was the best daddy he knew how to be." Instantaneously, the bitterness left and has not come back! Thank You, Lord!