It was about 100 years ago in 1927 that the American author and poet W. Livingston Learned wrote a short story that ran in *Reader's Digest* and was then published many times over, called simply "Father Forgets."

Written from the perspective of a father, it's his reflection of how with a little but of humility and introspection, he understood that while he loved his son, how he was expressing that could be improved.

He writes:

Listen son. I am saying this as you lie asleep, one little paw crumped under your cheek and the blond curls sticky wet on your damp forehead. I have stolen into your room alone. Just a few minutes ago, as I sat reading my paper in the library, a stifling wave of remorse swept over me. Guiltily, I came to your bedside.

These are the things I was thinking, son. I had been cross to you. I scolded you as you were dressing for school because you gave your face merely a dab with a towel. I took you to task for not cleaning your shoes. I called out angrily when you threw some of your things on the floor.

At breakfast, I found fault, too. You spilled things. You gulped down your food. You put your elbows on the table. You spread butter too thick on your bread. And as you started off to play and I made for my train, you turned and waved a hand and called “Good-bye, Daddy!” and I frowned and said in reply, “Hold your shoulders back!”

Then it began all over again in the late afternoon, As I came up the road, I spied you, down on your knees playing marbles. There were holes in your socks. I humiliated you before your friends by marching you ahead of me to the house. Socks were expensive - and if you had to buy them, you would be more careful! Imagine that, son, from a father!

Do you remember later, when I was reading in the library, how you came in, timidly, with a sort of hurt look in your eyes? When I glanced up over my paper, impatient at the interruption, you hesitated at the door. “What is you want?” I snapped.

You said nothing, but ran across in one tempestuous plunge, and threw your arms around my neck and kissed me and your small arms tightened

with affection that God had set blooming in your heart and that even neglect could not wither. And then you were gone, pattering up the stairs. Well, son, it was shortly afterwards that my paper slipped from my hands and a terrible sickening fear came over me. What has habit been doing to me? The habit of finding fault, of reprimanding - this was my reward to you for being a boy. It was not that I did not love you; it was that I expected too much of you. I was measuring you by the yardstick of my years.

And there was so much that was good and fine and true in your character. The little heart of you was as big as the dawn itself over the wide hills. This was shown by your spontaneous impulse to rush in and kiss me goodnight. Nothing else matters tonight, son. I have come to your bedside in the darkness, and I have knelt here, ashamed!

It is a feeble moment; I know you would not understand these things if I told them to you during your waking hours. But tomorrow, I will be a real daddy! I will chum with you and suffer when you suffer, and laugh when you laugh. I will bit my tongue when impatient words come. I will keep saying as if it were a ritual: “He is a little boy - let him be a little boy!”

I am afraid I have visualized you as a man. Yet as I see you now son, crumpled and weary in your bed, I see that you are a still a baby. Yesterday you were in your mother's arms, your head on her shoulder. I have asked too much of you, yet given too little of myself. Promise me, as I teach you to have the manners of a man, that you will remind me how to have the loving spirit of a child.

The boy of course just wanted to be loved, and reminded his father he loved him much as God loves us, with no strings attached, and he's grateful for his father being in his life.

The father wasn't a bad man at all, it's just that he had let a bit of stubbornness and pride had perhaps crept in so that he was a bit blind to how he could become even better; and much like Naaman the mighty general, who had his eyes opened by a slave girl, the father in the story's eyes are opened through the love of his son.

As we continue our journey in faith, both of these things - the humility that is the antidote to pride, and the gratefulness that we show to a loving God, are fundamental to us finding the true happiness that we long for.

With respect to humility, much like that father was able to humble himself, when we do so we'll find that we can get an honest sense of where we can grow as people.

Though the first reading wasn't in *Reader's Digest* as far as I know, it could have been because we get an abridged version of it. The background is Naaman is this mighty general but he is unfortunately a leper. A slave girl encourages him to go see Elisha. He finally does, but Elisha won't even come to the door damaging Naaman's ego. He's about to huff and puff and leave but his servants get him to come to his senses and then he washes himself in the water and his skin becomes clean.

It's a great story showing us how with humility, we can find that true happiness and peace. Like Naaman, we need to get over our ego. And a few things can be helpful for us to do that, namely combining humility with a bit of gratitude.

One is to pray daily. When we pray, we realize we have dependence on God and need Him in our lives. We come to Mass to be nourished by Jesus 'Body which helps us to persevere and to avoid sin, and to make

good choices. We recognize we need God journeying with us, and that He is there to help us.

Related to this, as we pray, we can do a good examination of conscience from time to time. This is a great idea to do at the end of the day, because as we go along, we sometimes can forget we are always work in progress. Mom is no longer asking “did you do your homework” or “did you take out the trash” or “did you clean your room?” In all our lives, we can do things better. When we listen to our conscience, we can say “yeah, I need to do better as a member of this family” or “this stuff is sneaking up in my life again and has to go” or “I haven’t been praying or going to Mass like I should.” This is what the father did after his son hugged him; it triggered that introspection that led to healing and him becoming a better man and dad. Our conscience is there to keep us humble and to help us grow, but we need to listen to it.

Third, do you, like Naaman, listen to the slave girl or the people who come to you? Note the father ultimately listened to his son’s words behind his words, that caused him to become a better dad. Maybe it’s a young child like the slave girl who tells a parent mom, why don’t we go to church every

weekend or how come you are using words you told me not to use? Or perhaps a friend who is concerned about our demeanor, or a spouse who sees us becoming more irritable or becoming more distant in the relationship. It's hard to listen because inside of us like Naaman is that person who wants to give into ego and say I'm not going to bother and this is ridiculous what do they know, but Naaman had some sense talked in to him and we need that too. God gives us people to help us, so we need to listen to them. With this we also need to trust in the Church and listen to Her, as She is there to guide us in faith and morals and helps us find the path to true happiness.

Fourth, we need to, like Naaman, admit we can't do it on our own. This is where we are open to the compassion of others and also become people of compassion, much like that slave girl. She had no need to help Naaman, but she sees something in him.  Again, we need God. We need other people. He could not hide his leprosy, and we can't hide ours either. An addiction to sensualism or sins of the flesh; to alcohol; to greed; to fear of what others may think of is; a problem with wrath and holding grudges or being too angry at others over politics or this or that. Pick your sin; all of are

lepers. But when we say “God show me the way” and listen to the people in our lives, we can also become clean.

Fifth, we do the work, which is often humbling. The father went to his son’s bedside and spoke from his heart. He focused on being a dad, doing the little things to show love to his son. The same is true as we strive to grow in holiness. You recognize a flaw or something you want to do, and then have a fall; well you go to confession and pick yourself back up by reaching out to God. Or you realize hey this is hard doing this work for my family, working hard at school, or giving up something that I really enjoyed but now realize was destructive and diminishing me as a person, but I got to keep at it.

Lastly, gratitude is also a big part of our journey; the son in the story was just happy to have a father; and the one leper in the Gospel is grateful for his cure so he comes back to give thanks. The other 9 were not necessarily bad people; they were just caught up in their own world and problems, much like the father before his eyes were opened had a bit of tunnel vision. Hopefully on our part, we give thanks to God too - for as Jesus walks and makes this difficult journey toward Jerusalem while helping people, He also

is walking towards you and me. We show that gratitude through our prayer, our walking with the Lord, but also through a way of life in how we allow that love of the Lord to transform us, as it transformed Naaman who spent the rest of his days giving thanks to God, and the father who allowed love to transform him into seeing how blessed he was to have such a great son.

Every time I offer Mass, I wash my hands and pray “Lord, wash away my inequity, cleanse me of my sins,” because it’s a reminder to me as the priest I am unworthy do do what I do at this altar, but God loves me and wills I be made clean. And every time I hear confessions, and go to them as a penitent, I’m reminded of my own need for ongoing conversion and cleansing too. Like you, I am a leper; and like him sometimes I can be stubborn, or like the father in the story sometimes I can be blind to the ways I need to improve. But when we make friends with our shadows, when we go through the work of trying to grow in holiness and grace, we, like Naaman, will find what we are looking for. So let’s let go of our ego and our pride, seeing the real person inside that God sees and looks at with love and mercy. Let us never forget that time and time again Jesus comes to be with us because He loves us so much. And may we allow that love to not only cleanse us, but then use that love to transform one another.