

FATHER'S DAY MESSAGE

Grace Brethren Church

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Today is Father's Day. I can still remember the birth of my daughter and my son. I was there to observe both of their deliveries. I was their Dad!

What an awesome responsibility. God designed families to consist of one man and one woman for a lifetime. And if God so chooses to bless a couple with children – their world forever changes. **They become not just a husband and wife, but a father and mother!** Whether there is only one child or perhaps as many as six or more, parenthood becomes a blessing and a daily challenge. And it is God's plan for such a union to serve as a foundation for society.

Today, I want to share some thoughts with you as a father to other fathers, grandfathers and even surrogate dads. This will not be a three-point sermon – just words of encouragement and challenge prompted by experience and God's Word.

Although fatherhood, like motherhood, is a natural extension of marriage, neither has a list of prerequisite qualifications. In fact, many people today don't even think marriage is necessary to be a father or mother, regardless of what God says! You don't have to pass an **exam** to demonstrate your knowledge of children or how to raise them. There is no requirement to have a **well-paying job** or certain amount of **money** set aside.

Perhaps you have heard the saying, "Parents are those with no prior experience. Those with experience are called grandparents!"

Having said that, the Bible describes characteristics of a **wise** father, a **godly** father, and a **loving** father – among others. For instance, Proverbs is a book written by a father to give wisdom to his son. In chapter 1, verse 8, we read -- "*Hear, my son, your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching....*" These words presume that the instruction of the father and the teaching of the mother have life-giving value for the child, and the child needs to pay attention.

My Dad did not always give instruction by talking. But he demonstrated some very important values like hard work, being resourceful, living up to your word, and commitment. They were life-giving lessons, and as the oldest child in the family, I learned a lot of positive things from my Dad – from what he said and how he lived.

I remember a time when I was a young teenager that the company my Dad worked for was bought-out by another company. By that time my Dad had become a manager, having worked 28 years for the company. He knew all the people who worked under him, and many of them were his friends. The new company wanted to **restructure**, and they told my Dad he had to fire a number of those under his management. They thought they could force him to do it, knowing that many were his friends, because if he didn't, he would be fired himself and lose 28 years of pension! But my Dad was a man of principle. He would not fire any of his friends. As a result, he lost his job AND the 28 years of pension!! That decision spoke more clearly than words to me about the meaning of **commitment, dedication,** and the value of **friendship**.

Fatherhood is not for wimps. It is **not** about making babies and then disappearing from their lives – as happens all too often in certain segments of our society today. Any Dad who chooses to be absentee from his children's lives teaches whether he knows it or not. He teaches that irresponsibility is OK, that living how you want is OK, that family really doesn't matter! And the results are devastating in the lives of the children left behind. It also perpetuates the problem for future generations, since there is no positive model of fatherhood. This is like a slap on the face of God because it is a rejection of God and His plan for mankind.

Yet God knows us. He knows the weaknesses and the potential of every person. Because He knows us, God has a design for fatherhood that elevates it to one of the highest and most noble roles under heaven.

In fact, God uses the word "**Father**" to identify His relationship to us. He is our Father God. Therefore, He is a most perfect example of what being a Father really means. For example, one of the roles of fathers is identified in **Hebrews 12:4-11** we read:

*⁴ You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; ⁵ and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "**MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY***

HIM; ⁶ FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." ⁷ *It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?* ⁸ *But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.* ⁹ *Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?* ¹⁰ *For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.* ¹¹ *All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

Discipline is different than punishment. The root word for **punishment** refers to PAIN. Punishment is a penalty for wrong behavior often motivated by anger or frustration on the part of the parent. It focuses on the past wrong or the immediate situation.

Discipline, on the other hand, has the root word meaning TO LEARN. It is the same root we have for the word Disciple. The purpose of discipline is to promote right behavior so that a person grows. Therefore, it is future focused. The goal is to provide nurture and instruction to help the child learn the right way to live, motivated by the parent's love for the child.

This is what we see in **Hebrews 12**. God *disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.* And that is a model for how fathers should discipline their children.

When Paul gives instruction to Timothy on the kind of people he should appoint for church ministry as elders or deacons, he says this in **1 Timothy 3:4-5, and 12** -- ⁴ *An elder must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity* ⁵ *but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?* ¹² *Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.*

In other words, these men needed to be an example of godly fatherhood. It doesn't say they needed to be perfect, but rather that the character of their lives was both significant and important to their role of leadership in the church!

Some men think that a father's role should be in the background, especially in the early years of a child's life. However, we find no such teaching in Scripture. Each parent is important to the complete nurturing process of a child, from their early years and until they are launched into life as an adult. After that, their role changes to that of an advisor, counselor, and friend.

There is a saying that, "*There is no rest for the weary!*" These words are very appropriate to fathers and mothers. The role of father and mother is not a 9 to 5 job that you can leave when the time is done. It is full-time, regardless of how tired and exhausted you feel. The responsibility is 24-7-365!!

I know what it is like to leave for work early and come home tired at night. Sadly, it is also part of the life of a pastor. I remember many times I came home mentally exhausted. I just wanted some peace and quiet. But being a Dad seldom allows for that luxury. When I got home, Carol was often physically exhausted. She wanted some peace and quiet, too. As a result, there were times when (let me say this graciously) we were cranky and not very friendly with each other or the children – and we only had two! But young children, especially, have a way of wearing out the spirit of even the most resilient parent.

I think that is a context for the words of Paul in **Colossians 3:21** -- *Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.* Children are resilient. They are physically delicate, but emotionally they have some flexibility. Thankfully, not every parental mistake results in the child being emotionally damaged for life. Yet there are boundaries and limitations. Negative comments can very definitely do damage, especially if they are common.

Saying things like, "*Can't you do anything right?*" // "*Stay out of the way!*" // "*What is the matter with you?*" // "*Haven't you finished yet?*" // "*Why can't you be more like _____?*" // "*I wish I never had kids!*" // "*You'll never change!*"

These are phrases guaranteed to "exasperate" your child. They annoy and irritate the child and can even leave emotional scars. These words drain enthusiasm. They are words of discouragement. They are definitely not nurturing and life-giving.

Paul's instruction to fathers is so that the child "*will not lose heart.*" Whether he is tired or not, a father's words are important to his wife AND his children. There should be words of encouragement,

acceptance, tenderness, positive correction – and it is never too late to apologize when you have been too harsh or unloving.

Remember, the father's example should model a positive image of what a father is like, so that a child or young person can identify God as a loving Father as well. >> One of the saddest commentaries of our society is when a person cannot understand the concept of God as a loving heavenly Father because they never experienced that kind of relationship on the human level.

Looking back on my life, I realize that a father's role is **multi-faceted**. There is no one complete job description that fits everyone. Men come with different experiences, abilities, skills, interests and potential into their role as a father.

I have heard fatherhood described as a shepherding role, as that of a mentor, a disciple-maker, a superhero and even a product manager. I suppose all of them are true to some extent. But none of them are complete, and as men we can easily be overwhelmed by the expectations of our wives, extended family members, and even our friends. Remember, fatherhood is **not for wimps!** It takes courage to stand up and make a positive contribution to the growth and development of our children – *and sometimes even the children of others.*

Perhaps the words we read in [Deuteronomy 6](#) are a good place to consider other important aspects of our role as fathers. Here we read words that Moses spoke to the people of Israel after they had come out of slavery in Egypt. God was shaping them to be His special people, a new nation, and He wanted them to live in such a way that knowledge of Him and His commandments would pass naturally from one generation to the next.

To accomplish this goal, Moses did not instruct them how to operate a public school system. He did not initiate a weekly Sunday School. God did not even give the responsibility to the religious leaders. Instead, he gave it to fathers and mothers! God elevated the role of parents to a very high and respected position in the nation, because the very future of the nation depended on them fulfilling this tremendously challenging responsibility.

Notice what he says in verses 4-9: -- ⁴ *"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!"* ⁵ *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all*

your might. ⁶ "These words, which I am commanding you today, **shall be on your heart.** ⁷ "You shall **teach them diligently** to your sons and shall **talk of them** when you **sit** in your house and when you **walk** by the way and when you **lie down** and when you **rise up.** ⁸ "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹ "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

There are several important things we need to understand here.

FIRST, the people are to have a personal relationship with God. Notice the personal pronouns in [verse 5](#). *[read with emphasis]*

SECOND, they were to know God's truth, His commands to them ([verse 6](#)). Deuteronomy is a "second presentation" of God's laws and expectations for His people. He knew that you cannot pass on what you do not possess.

THIRD, it is the role of the father (and mother) to teach those same things to their children ([verse 7](#)). And he includes a qualifier, because he says they are to do it "**diligently**," which means they need to put energy into it consistently and intentionally.

As a parent, I learned that the hardest thing is consistency. And even though it is imperfect, that should be our goal.

FOURTH, this is to be accomplished naturally through their normal, everyday lives. This is very important. Look again at [verse 7](#): it says that parents are to use a variety of common opportunities for teaching. *[read the verse again]* And...

FINALLY, [verse 8](#) implies that we should have personal and public reminders so that we make the most of our time.

This is not talking about tattoos on your hand and forehead! The devout Jews tried to obey this literally by tying little boxes to their hand and forehead that had a verse of Scripture in it. That is NOT what is meant here.

One of the things Carol and I have made a part of our lives is to have **visual prompts** around our home to remind us of who we are and who God is. Bible verses, biblical phrases or principles on pictures; magnets on the refrigerator; a key chain – anything that could serve as a reminder to us and our children. Of

course you need to take time to see them, because they can quickly become just more background clutter that we ignore.

These words from Moses are not specifying a regimented routine. It is not instruction on how to have daily family devotions – although that might be part of what we can do. Rather, it takes the teaching to a whole new level. It is **holistic** – meaning that everything you say and do is part of the teaching process.

This was a radical new concept for me as a young father. When I came to understand that my children were learning from everything I said and did, and even my attitude, I began to realize that some things in my life needed to change!

It is important to notice, fathers, that you cannot give your responsibility to your wife. You each have a role, and you must learn to do your part. It is **not** the responsibility of the church or Sunday School to provide spiritual nurturing to your children. They should only be supplemental. God has designed godly **families** for the purpose of accomplishing what schools and government programs cannot – the whole-life development of your child so that they, too, can participate in God's great plan.

It is kind of scary, because it means your faith needs to be out front in every part of your life. It makes your faith operational. Your words, attitude, countenance, body language, activities – even the TV shows you watch, are all part of the continual training process. What this means is that how you live makes a greater impact than just what you say!

Last year, Father's Day was just a couple of days after my open heart surgery. Because of the surgery, my daughter and her family and my son came to Colorado Springs to be here during that time. Before I went to the hospital for the surgery, they presented me with a surprise gift of a photo book of memories that they had compiled and had printed in a book [*hold up the book*]. The combination of photo-memories and associated words were a graphic reminder that it is not just the big events of life, but what at the time may seem to be even the incidental parts of our lives – they ALL build memories.

Dads, these words from Deuteronomy present God's design for how you can effectively pass on your values, your beliefs, and your worldview so that your children grow up to love God! It is not an ironclad guarantee of

how your children will turn out, but it gives your children every advantage to know Jesus and to develop their own spiritual convictions to live by – because, ultimately, they will be responsible for the choices they make.

So, **if you need to change** so that you begin passing on a legacy of faith to your children, perhaps a starting place is to rethink your own relationship with Jesus Christ. If your spiritual life is passive and weak, you need to come to Jesus and ask Him to help you. If you have habits, routines or sin in your life that are keeping you away from God and your family, you need to ask Jesus to help you break those habits and to rebuild your priorities.

Fathers, you have a crucial God-given role to play in the growth and development of your children. Stand up, and with God's help face the challenge with courage and conviction. *If you choose **not** to be involved, not only will your children will suffer for it, but your future generations as well.*

If you come from a background where your father was not a godly example, or perhaps was a verbally or physically abusive father – you can choose to BREAK the cycle with God's help so that your children will grow up with a positive example. You don't have to be a victim of your past!

I also want to pass on a lesson I learned from experience: that TIME is more valuable than MONEY or THINGS, especially in how you relate to your children! I engraved a plaque for Carol and I that reads, "The most important things in life – aren't things!" (Relationships...!)

Dads, I hope these words are encouraging and challenging to you. It is NOT intended to produce guilt. Rather, I want to help you see that TODAY can be the opportunity of a new start if you need it. Remember, you are not alone in your journey.

Dad's, I want to leave you with one idea and three basic questions:

>>> First of all, I would like to challenge you to think of three things you will do each week to build positive memories with your kids.

- 1) What positive memories are you building into your children's lives?
- 2) What spiritual legacy are you giving to your children?
- 3) How are you preparing your children to "launch" into life?

>>> PRAY <<<