

“A Few Words about Being a Father”
Deuteronomy 4:9-14, Ephesians 6:1-4
Father’s Day, June 21, 2015
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Did Father’s Day sneak up on you this year? It is one of the holiday’s that is not firmly established in our minds. Is it the 2nd or 3rd Sunday in June or is it May? Sometimes the ads on TV help but then they start so early we can’t be sure exactly when the day is. I loved the ad this year that started out, “Oh, honey don’t get me anything for Father’s Day I don’t need ... wow look at that fishing rod.” Though my favorite was the woman’s voiceover on a Golfsmith (the golfing store) ad about going and buying a new \$700 set of irons and receiving a \$100 gift certificate. “I just wrapped up that gift certificate in a new book and gave it to Dad for Father’s Day. He couldn’t believe someone would give him a \$100 gift certificate to his favorite store. He was so happy! And I was happy too playing with those new irons.”

Father’s Day means different things to different people. For some it is about giving a gift or a hug or maybe a cherry pie to Dad on the big day. For others it is not a day to remember at all. They have bad memories of their father or no memories as he was either an abusive Dad or an absentee Dad or at least that is the way you remember it he was not an important part of your life.

I know preaching on the subject of fathers or Father’s Day can be a slippery slope. So my apologies ahead of time if this steps on your emotional toes or touches on a subject that is tough just now for you.

A little boy writes a letter to God:

Dear God,

Thank you for giving me a daddy. You knew just what I’d need! In case you need to make daddies for other kids, I thought you might like to know what I like best about the one you sent me:

A good dad ... knows everything, like how to tie a tail on a kite or ride a bike.
Is really smart, he can build the best car out of a block of wood you ever saw. (derby)
Has a forgiving heart, for when I mess up.
Is loaded with patience, patience, ... he probably won’t need it, but just in case.
Has a big laugh and wide smile.
And tells me about you and your Son.

Your Friend,
A Kid

P.S. I almost left out the best part! A good dad has real strong arms, to catch me when I fall. He says you’re just like that, too! (Idea from Max Lucado)

The Bible has some things to say about being a dad and in all places in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 4. It is an exceptional and eloquent story, despite the fact that very few people read the book of Deuteronomy. Moses is nearing the end of his life in this story. Remember he was 70 years old when God called him to leave the shepherding business of his father-in-law Jethro and go down to Egypt and free the Hebrews. Then it was a 40 year wandering in the wilderness trying to make this rag-tag group of individuals into a nation. So to say that Moses was a little long in the tooth might be an exaggeration. But before he left them to join God in heaven he had some advice for them. He starts by saying, "Take heed to yourself, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen and they depart from your heart." Moses wanted the fathers in the crowd to fortify themselves first; strengthen their own knowledge, faith and self-esteem. There are all kinds of things that need to get done in your family, in the larger community and in your career but the first thing God wants you to do is to take care of you.

Take care of yourself. If you don't take care of you, you will be no good to anyone else. How is a child going to lean on you when they need help if you are having trouble holding yourself up? If you aren't able to discover what it is God has intended you to do with your life, how are you going to share that gift from God with a child or anyone else in your life? You cannot give away what you don't have. Take care of you. I'm not talking about going out and buying lavish things like a Harley for you. Booking a two week golf outing, or a fishing trip to Alaska or a fantasy football camp with the Dawg's and say ... "the Reverend said I was to take care of me first." What I am saying is you need to protect your own sense of balance before you can stand firm and tall for others.

Men, it starts with us. We have to take care of ourselves. When you take a commercial air flight and you get on the plane and all settled in and take out a magazine to read or fire up your laptop or I-pad, you know what happens next? One of the flight attendants begins talking about safety and what you are to do in case of an emergency. She talks about the lights on the floor that will lead you to an exit and they also talk about the oxygen masks that will fall down in front of you. You are to take hold of it, pull it down to make sure the oxygen can flow freely and then she says, "If you are traveling with a child make sure you put your mask on first before you attend to the child." That always sounds a bit selfish doesn't it? But then, what good will you be to the child if you pass out cold from lack of oxygen? Men, take care of yourself first, so you can be of help to others in life.

Moses also reminded them that spiritual knowledge had to be current. "Lest you forget the things your eyes have seen and they depart from you all the days of your life." Isn't it funny how the Bible dwells on remembering what God has done? You might say that is a major theme in the Old Testament. Remember, God is the one who called your ancestors Abraham and Sarah from a distant land and brought them to this land flowing with milk and honey. Remember, God called Moses to lead you out of slavery into freedom. Remember, God gave you David as a mighty warrior and servant leader. Remember, God gave you Deborah as a judge to help rule over the people. Remember, God called Isaiah and Jeremiah to be prophets to remind you to follow God's ways. God reminded them a lot about who they were and whose they were. The creator has

showered you with blessings, how could you forget? The prophets ask, “Knowing what you have received, how can you be so ungrateful as to forget?”

Second Moses goes on to remind us that responsibility does not end if and when you “take heed to yourself.” That is a good start taking care of yourself. But the next step for the father is to make these things known to your children and your grandchildren.

We should never forget that we are living examples to our children. And the younger children especially the 2’s and 3’s and 4’s are like little sponges, just soaking up everything they hear and see. If you hear one of those 4 letter no-no words coming out of the mouth of your 3 year old and wonder, “Where did they learn that word?” Sometimes just a quick tap of the memory and something that slipped out of your mouth when the stop light changed too quickly or someone grabbed the parking space you were all set to slide into and you have to say, “Yes, it was me.”

Live your life in such a way that your children will say, “I want to be like you, Dad.” In his book, Achieving Success Without Failing our Family, Paul Faulkner describes the decision of an insurance executive. “Speaking at a businessman’s convention, the man stressed the importance of being a father first. The man’s daughter was in the audience and in the middle of his talk he turned to her and asked, *Sweetheart do you remember the time I won the million-dollar roundtable three years in a row?* And she said, *No Dad, I don’t guess I do.* And then he asked, *Well, do you remember when we used to have those Dairy Queen dates?* And she said, *Oh, yes.* And then he turned to the audience to make the point that daughters don’t remember when you sell a million dollars’ worth of insurance, but they do remember the trips to Dairy Queen.” They don’t remember your accomplishments but they do remember when you spent time with them. (Faulkner, pp. 143-44)

If you want them to be honest then be honest yourself. If you want them to go to church then go to church yourself. If you want them to love the Lord, show them your love of Christ by the way you treat them and their mother. If you are doing something stupid and out of character, quit it.

I know all of this can get very complicated. Families often take on a direction that they never planned when they started together as a couple and then with that first child. When a family breaks up, the children of divorce need freedom to develop their new lives. But still, the absent father should continue to live in such a way that his children knows that he loves them and that they can turn to him in need. That is what it means to be a father. That is your job. My late friend, Roy Gathman, a noted child psychologist once wrote, “if you mess up the job of raising your children it really doesn’t matter what else you do well.” God bless him, it’s true.

Children tend to value what you value and become what you are. A child who grows up in an abusive home will have a tendency to become an abusive parent. Studies show that. A child who is denied love by a father tends to withhold love from his children—not maliciously not even purposely, but it happens.

Moving on to our New Testament lesson, children also need to hear a word of encouragement. It can’t be negative all the time. They have to hear a word that builds up their self-image instead of tearing it down. Paul says in Ephesians, “Fathers, don’t keep on scolding and nagging your

children, making them angry and resentful, but bring them up in the loving discipline of the Lord with suggestions, examples and Godly advice.” It is a little surprising that St. Paul wrote that. He was not the kind of person who negotiated. He never attended a Dale Carnegie Course on winning friends and influencing people. He never hesitated in telling people what they should believe or the way they should behave. Yet he touches the right nerve here. Maybe Mrs. St. Paul told him to ease up a little, “Fathers, don’t go on nagging your children, but bring them up in the loving discipline of the Lord.”

Lastly, I would say once you have done your best, move on and surrender the rest to the Lord. It does not help to mope around, wishing you had done a better job or moaning that the church or the world is not a perfect place, or dwelling on how you failed as a father. You only go around once in life. You cannot re-live the past. Even God cannot make an old man young again. There are no perfect fathers, but we were not called upon to be perfect. Jesus Christ was perfect so that we don’t have to be. If you torpedo yourself for what you failed to do, you will sink into depression. The failures of a child are not the problems of the parent. We do the best we can and then we must let go.

When William Wallace the Scots warrior left Aberdeen to go off on his own at age 18, his Uncle-Father who had reared him said good-bye with words which are inscribed on the famous monument to Wallace down in Stirling: “I have brought you to the ring, now dance according to your skill.” Dance according to your skill. I did the best I could with what I knew. And, even if not, the world is moving on. It’s your turn now. You have your life; your children have theirs. Don’t let them get so tangled that the responsibilities get mixed up.

So Happy Father’s Day to all you fathers and Happy Son’s Day to all you sons who have no earthly fathers and happy day to all you mothers and daughters and sisters and brothers, too. We all share a heavenly Creator who loves us like a Parent, may God hold you and keep you in his care for now and ever more.