

Slightly Less Than Divine
Psalm 8 – Father’s Day

A father passing by his son’s bedroom was astonished to see the bed was nicely made, and everything was picked up. Then, he saw an envelope, propped up prominently on the pillow. It was addressed, “Dad.” With the worst premonition, he opened the envelope and read the letter, with trembling hands.

“Dear, Dad. It is with great regret and sorrow that I’m writing you. I had to elope with my new girlfriend, because I wanted to avoid a scene with Mom and you. I’ve been finding real passion with Stacy, and she is so nice, but I knew you would not approve of her, because of all her piercings, tattoos, her tight motorcycle clothes, and because she is so much older than I am. But it’s not only the passion, Dad. She’s pregnant. Stacy said that we will be very happy. She owns a trailer in the woods and has a stack of firewood for the whole winter. We share a dream of having many more children.

“Stacy has opened my eyes to the fact that marijuana doesn’t really hurt anyone. We’ll be growing it for ourselves and trading it with the other people in the commune, for all the cocaine and ecstasy we want. In the meantime, we’ll pray that science will find a cure for AIDS, so Stacy can get better. She sure deserves it!

“Don’t worry Dad, I’m 15, and I know how to take care of myself. Someday, I’m sure we’ll be back to visit, so you can get to know your many grandchildren.

“Love, your son, John.

“P.S. Dad, none of the above is true. I’m over at Tommy’s house. I just wanted to remind you that there are worse things in life than the school report card that’s on my desk. I love you! Call when it is safe for me to come home.”

Happy Father’s Day! If you are a Dad, please stand. If you have ever lost sleep over your children as a Dad, please stand. If you have grandchildren, please stand. Finally, if you have a Dad, living or deceased, please stand. Congratulations and thank you. There are a lot of jokes out there about Father’s Day. Some say every day is Father’s Day – a rather tongue in cheek statement. And truthfully, many times in our culture, Dads don’t get the credit they deserve. I bet more people will identify many shared qualities between Tim the Tool Man or Jeff Foxworthy and their Dads rather than Atticus Finch or Ward Cleaver. A nice balance between those choices would be ideal!!

But Dads you have a hugely critical role to play in the lives of your children. Children need to learn from both parents and particularly, the role of Fathers in the faith development of a child, is pivotal. Did you know that if a child is the first person in a household to become a Christian, there is a 3.5 % probability everyone else in the household will follow? If the mother is the first to become a Christian, there is a 17 % probability everyone else in the household will follow. But if the father is first, there is a 93 % probability everyone else in the household will follow. These are statistics from an article titled, “Want your church to grow? Then bring in the men,” *Baptist Press News*, April 3, 2003.

In all fairness it is not easy being a Dad. What I am about to say is highly sexist and gentlemen, I apologize profusely. Most women are hardwired to be nurturing, something I am fairly confident

comes as the result of all the physical changes that happen to a woman when she gives birth. Those same hormones that can drive you crazy also serve to build mothering characteristics and qualities in a woman. Plus, until the last 25-30 years or so, our culture has not been highly supportive of men who are sensitive, caring and gentle. Dads of the good old days of the 50's and 60's were portrayed as being rather clueless – the Ward Cleavers, Archie Bunkers, and Fred Flintstones of the world. Being a good dad doesn't come easily.

Being the kind of dad whose kids will one day remember him with fondness and joy is hard work. Being the kind of dad who, although being far from perfect, still manages to love and lead his children well is no easy task. Yes, ladies, the man in your life may make it look like second nature, but being the kind of man who knows just when to firmly say, “Walk it off” to his son and when to put his pride aside and play princesses with his little girl is tough stuff. My most favorite memory of my Papa is learning how to Waltz with him in our kitchen. We had a huge kitchen which was added on to the house to accommodate my mother's wheelchair. It was probably 20 by 24 feet. At least once a year, the kitchen table would be pushed against one wall and Viennese waltzes could be heard through the speaker and waltzing with Papa was like floating over Mom's highly polished kitchen floor. Being the kind of father that every little girl wants to one day walk her down the aisle and that every little boy wants to be like when he's bigger takes a ton of work.

Oh sure there are countless self-help books on fathering, a quick search on Amazon gives a person 544 choices in seconds. But there has always been a Biblical ‘self-help’ book. Anyone want to guess which book of the Bible is filled with advice for parenting? Correct, the book of Proverbs, is arguably the first book of such sage fathering advice. In chapter 3 the writer, a father himself, is offering his son a lesson in something that applies to each of us, man or not. The father is extolling his son in something deeper than lessons on camping, shaving and choosing the right cuff links. No, in Proverbs 3, his son, and we, get a lesson on godliness – the art of walking closely with our Creator. Verses 1-2: *My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.*

It's clear from these words that, like being a great dad, a life of godliness doesn't come easy. But it does come down to a handful of practices and attitudes that any man or woman aiming for it will spend their days readily embracing. First, says the father, godliness is grounded in an attitude of unrelenting love. At the heart of the Hebrew faith was a belief in Yahweh's *chesed*, often translated as “steadfast love”. It's the idea that God's love for his people never gives up or fades away. It's a belief that the goodness of God, although at times shrouded in seasons of struggle or pain, is always in hot pursuit of the people of God.

The godly person then is one who, having been transformed by such unending love from God, displays a faithful, unrelenting love for others. In Verse 3 he writes: *Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart.* Godliness it seems is first and foremost a God-shaped inner integrity. It's a divinely inspired attitude that drives you to be quick to forgive and ready to reconcile, as well as to be the kind of husband, wife or friend who refuses to run but instead fights for the future of the relationship.

In verses 5 to 8 the father continues the inward focus on the art of godliness and tells us that a truly godly person will not only have an attitude of unrelenting love for others, but also an intellectual

humility about himself or herself. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart*, he says. And *Be not wise in your own eyes*. It may sound simple, but a key skill for the godly is a refusal to believe that he or she already has all of the answers. Truly godly people are going to be well aware of their limitations and not just submit themselves to the wisdom of others, but first to the will and wisdom of God. This means that the art of godliness is also the art of prayer, where we make our needs known to him. It's the art of studying the Scriptures, where we submit ourselves to the truths he's revealed.

This is hardly the advice or stuff of Tim the Tool Man, but this is the meat and potatoes of God's design for Fatherhood. And bottom line, we must remember that all humankind was made in the image and likeness of our Creator. Psalm 8 clearly states in verse 4 & 5; *what are human beings that you think about them; what are human beings that you pay attention to them? You've made them only slightly less than divine, crowning them with glory and grandeur*.

This hymn of praise is not only a proclamation of the supreme authority of God, but also an affirmation of the exalted status of human beings. *O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!* it begins, extolling God for his magnificent work as the Creator of heaven and earth. *When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?* (vv. 1-4).

This psalm reminds us that the Creator of an infinite universe has chosen to be "mindful" of us and to care for us - an absolutely amazing attitude for an almighty Lord to have. We've been made "a little lower" than God and crowned with glory and honor (v. 5). And why is this? To join God in the care of creation. To share God's power and unite with him in being mindful of the other creatures of his world. Dominion does not mean domination in this particular view of the world - it means being good caretakers of creation and using our authority and control for the proper maintenance of what God has given us, and the very basic place this begins is in the home when we become parents.

While this text is largely used to teach that as creatures made slightly less than divine, you and I are to be faithful stewards and caretakers of the land, something which has only become critical in my lifetime. My focus is solely on making sure each one of you know that you are so precious and loved by God that you were made slightly less than divine. God is God and God always come first...but you and I are next in line. You and I are fearfully and wonderfully made. We live in a time where we are bombarded daily with the news that we are anything but – we are too skinny, too plump, too plain, too bald...but wait for only \$19.99 this special product will melt the inches away!! Each and every time one of God's precious sons and daughters buys into society's definition of beauty – God sheds tears. After all, how cool is it that the same God that created mountains and oceans and galaxies looked at you and thought the world needed one of you, too? Do I need to remind you that when God created humankind in Genesis, he proclaimed that it was not only 'good', but it was VERY good?

So Dads, give yourself a break. If you are more of an Archie Bunker than Atticus Finch, embrace that you have been made a slightly less than divine. Remember that there is sage wisdom for fatherhood in the pages of Scripture. And, remember, you are not in this alone – the Holy Spirit will guide you – remember that one of the characteristics of the Holy Spirit is that of helper!!

If the Holy Spirit can help you understand the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament and the of the mercy and loving kindness of God in the Old Testament, surely the Spirit will help you put on your Princely costume to take your little princess to the Father/Daughter dance, or to pick up your light saber to battle the monsters of the entire Galactic World with your boys!

In closing, some words about What Dad's Do from the late Erma Bombeck:

What Does a Dad Do?

Last year I received a letter too late to use for Father's Day, but it is still relevant. A single mother had raised a son who was about to become a dad. Since he had no recollection of his own father, her question to me was "What do I tell him a father does?"

When my dad died in my ninth year, I, too, was raised by my mother, giving rise to the same question, "What do fathers do?" As far as I could observe, they brought around the car when it rained so everyone else could stay dry.

They always took the family pictures, which is why they were never in them. They carved turkeys on Thanksgiving, kept the car gassed up, weren't afraid to go into the basement, mowed the lawn, and tightened the clothesline to keep it from sagging.

It wasn't until my husband and I had children that I was able to observe firsthand what a father contributed to a child's life. What did he do to deserve his children's respect? He rarely fed them, did anything about their sagging diapers, wiped their noses or fannies, played ball, or bonded with them under the hoods of their cars.

What did he do?

He threw them higher than his head until they were weak from laughter. He cast the deciding vote on the puppy debate. He listened more than he talked. He let them make mistakes. He allowed them to fall from their first two-wheeler without having a heart attack. He read a newspaper while they were trying to parallel park a car for the first time in preparation for their driving test.

If I had to tell someone's son what a father really does that is important, it would be that he shows up for the job in good times and bad times. He's a man who is constantly being observed by his children. They learn from him how to handle adversity, anger, disappointment and success.

He won't laugh at their dreams no matter how impossible they might seem. He will dig out at 1 a.m. when one of his children runs out of gas. He will make unpopular decisions and stand by them. When he is wrong and makes a mistake, he will admit it.

He sets the tone for how family members treat one another, members of the opposite sex and people who are different than they are. By example, he can instill a desire to give something back to the community when its needs are greater than theirs.

But mostly, a good father involves himself in his kids' lives. The more responsibility he has for a child, the harder it is to walk out of his life.

A father has the potential to be a powerful force in the life of a child. Grab it!

Happy Father's Day to all Fathers or those of you who have been like a Father to someone!