

# Father's Day 2017

06/18/2017

Ephesians 6:4

*<sup>4</sup>Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Today is Father's Day, the day that we recognize and honor our male parental unit. Not long ago we were celebrating Mother's Day. Well, it's our turn today.

I've heard it said that "It is much easier to become a father than to be one." I can identify with that statement. I remember looking at my wife and first born son, and seeing how well they fit: she nurtured naturally with an innate ability that needed no coaching.

When I watched Mary and our children, I recognized the same quality – a naturalness and ease. Not to say that is easy being a mother. Nothing could be further from the truth.

But I think a woman moves more naturally from being a wife to a mother than a man moves from husband to father. The mother's role is more defined; the object and nature more apparent.

Sometimes we young fathers flounder in our responsibility. I remember feeling as though my place was to protect and serve...like a policeman or something. I had ideas floating around in my mind that I was the provider. But there was not a distinction between being a husband and a father; there was just another person in the house that fell under my responsibility. I was certainly a partner in the rearing of the children, but I always

saw myself as the helper, the assistant, and a source of support for Mary rather than the primary care giver.

Billy Graham said that “A good father is one of the most unsung, unpraised, unnoticed, and yet one of the most valuable assets in our society.”

I really notice a difference in Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. It seems that there are many people who did not have that good father that Billy Graham referred to. Some men struggle to find their place in the family, to discover their parental responsibility. So, we can acknowledge that there are those in this life who are not aware of whom their father was. Regardless, there is much to be thankful for.

We can also acknowledge that there are those who know who their fathers are, but wished that they didn’t. Life within a structure of a family is sometimes difficult.

A generation or two ago and prior, men were not trained to nurture their offspring like women do naturally. It was not thought of as a man’s job. It was a man’s job to work and take care of the family. If he could do that, then he had served his purpose.

Today it is different. Often both parents are needed to support the household. Men are evolving into a more nurturing creature. Yes, we have a long ways to go, but we are in the process of becoming our fullest selves; we men are starting to choose to express all of God through our thoughts and actions and not just what society dictates.

Still, it is easy for men to confine themselves to their usual natures: to provide protection, offer advice on business and financial matters, to observe and offer correction to make things work better, to make and enforce rules, and approach things logically. We can teach our youngsters to throw, bat, think strategically, focus on details or see the big picture. We like to fix things. Emotions are to be avoided, unless they are aggression and intimidation. At times it is better to set aside even logic and reason for duty and responsibility.

But I see a veil lifting on our male consciousness, as I see it happening throughout all of society. We are beginning to see past the limits of collective unconscious male stereotypical behavior. I believe we are awakening to the idea that we are more than just these bodies. We are spirit-beings, not only human beings; and as such we are more than our animal urges and survival instincts.

We are beginning to love freely and express compassion, understanding, and harmony openly, which was difficult, if not forbidden in the past. I see that men and women today are becoming more balanced than years ago. It is not so much that we are being forced to, but I believe we are being given the opportunity to grow and we are accepting the challenge.

Perhaps our own fathers were caught in the societal web of traditional male virtues. Our own fathers may have been flawed and difficult to even love because of the image of themselves that they held.

Christ commands that we love our neighbors – anyone not us. Our parents are part of that ‘anyone not us’ group, so we are to

love them. In addition, the Bible commands us to honor them ... to value them, obey them, and respect them. Not always, but often, the love part comes naturally. Our parents may have been particularly unlovable, but we can still respect them and treat them with dignity, and then learn to love them from a distance.

Then there are those of us who had wonderful parents, and maintain precious memories of our fathers, the laughter of sitting as a family and playing games or sports together.

My dad was pretty amazing: I don't think there was anything that man couldn't fix. I know that Mom looks to me today to fill those shoes. But those are mighty big shoes to fill. I do my best, but there are things I dare not do that I know Dad would have knocked out in a short while.

For those of you who have fond memories of your father, and your father is still walking the earth, I encourage you to call him and thank him for all he has done for you. If they are in spirit, then take a moment to turn inward to thank them. They will hear you.

Phyllis McGinley, children's book author said this: "The thing to remember about fathers is... they're men. A girl has to keep it in mind: They are dragon-seekers, bent on improbable rescues. Scratch any father, you find someone chock-full of qualms and romantic terrors, believing change is a threat, like your first shoes with heels on, like your first bicycle."

Sadly for some men, the very appearance of a young child into their domain is a significant change and therefore a serious threat.

If your experience with your Father was less than acceptable, still honor them ... learn to love them as a fellow human being, if not a father. They were 50% responsible for you having life at all. For that you can be grateful, if nothing more. Move into the stillness where only you and God are present, and thank them; then try to forgive them. I certainly hope that my children will forgive my mistakes and shortcomings as a father.

If we knew better, we'd do better. So we try to expose our children to behavior that is acceptable, and that comes primarily from our own example. I came across an anonymous quote: "A father is neither an anchor to hold us back nor a sail to take us there, but a guiding light whose love shows us the way."

It makes me wonder what memories my children will have of me as a father. Umberto Eco shared this idea: "I believe that what we become depends on what our fathers teach us at odd moments, when they aren't trying to teach us. We are formed by the little scraps of wisdom."

See, that is what concerns me: what were my kids paying attention to that I wasn't? Was my light shining brightly enough and in the right direction for each of my children? Was I too strict, not strict enough? Did I tell them how special they are enough times; too many times? Did I tell them how much I loved them, and how proud I was of them enough? Did I set a good example? Did I make myself available? Did I open lines of communication? Did I guide them clearly? Did I teach my children well enough, and point them in the right direction for the

answers they need? Did I support them enough with my words and actions?

William Shakespeare wrote something that speaks to me: “When a father gives to his son, both laugh; when a son gives to his father, both cry.” I think fathers will understand that.

It is not easy being a parent, as many of you know. We do the best that we can with our children, just as our fathers and mothers did for us, and then we hope that their own resources and consciousness will see them through the rest of their lives. So when we receive back any form of gratitude from sons or daughters – a gift, a smile, a word of thanks, a hug - it makes us believe that maybe we did an adequate job after all.

So whether you are a Father or not, male or not, you at least had a Father ... and today we acknowledge that person, and give back to that person. We recognize the challenges they had or have, as they raised their children. We acknowledge our own Fathers, in body and in spirit, for the challenges they had as they raised us. They got us made, and we’ve gotten this far, and we can be grateful for that. The rest has been up to us.

With the help of our growing awareness of God within, and our willingness to express the light and love of Christ, we men will continue to evolve and involve ourselves. Happy Father’s Day.

Let us pray....