

God – the model Father (Various Verses)

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

What is one positive memory and experience you had with your father as a child? Or maybe you don't remember a father but you remember a man when you were little who was kind and helpful to you. As a child, what is one encounter with your father or an adult male, that you remember with happiness?

My father wasn't perfect, but I knew he loved me. Often at night, when he was not traveling, he would be with us in the living room, but mentally he was thinking about work. But when we would play games, he'd be fully with us. And him just being available – offered opportunities for many conversations. Also, seeing him reading Barkley commentaries laying around was a witness to us.

One special time he took me and a group of my friends camping, for a whole weekend. Also, he helped each of his children with some money toward university. But what was most important were the life lessons he taught me. Not just by telling me, but by his living.

Today is Father's Day so let's think about fathers and men. Men all over the world have their work cut out for them. Because science and sociology is finding that the Bible is right. *Exodus 34:7 tells us: "Yet God does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."*

This sounds cruel but I don't think it means, God seeks out and punishes children for their parent's sins. Instead I think it does mean, that the influence of a parent, on their child, can be positive or negative. And this influence, affects not just their children but their grandchildren and great grandchildren. So I think the Bible is saying, adults have a great responsibility toward their offspring to the third and fourth generations. This includes all grandfathers, great grandfathers, uncles and so on. Any man in the family system.

What does this mean in real terms? We know that many of the men in prison, in some places up to 80% of them, did not have a father in the home when they grew up. We know that men desert their wife & children, not just physically but emotionally and financially. Or they are abusive toward women and children. A result of the coronavirus quarantine is, divorces have increased as well as child abuse and wife abuse. We know boys without good male role models in their lives have more problems growing up and they tend to have a harder time in life.

So I don't think it's an accident that in the Bible the words and idea of "Fathers" and "Fatherhood" are mentioned with almost 2,000 direct references in the Old & New Testaments. Many of these terms are used to talk about God as Father. Without a doubt, fatherhood has long been on the mind of God. We know that Fatherhood is the greatest delight of a man's life, but it is also his biggest challenge. So what can we learn today?

Here is a quick list of ideas and Bible verses for fatherhood and for all men toward children from various parts of the Bible. It's a good list for men to follow. We can never be the perfect father that God is for all of us. But we can do our best to father our children, and we can be a spiritual father to others. We have the privilege to nurture our children so we need to do it well. What does fathering look like?

First, gently kindly lead your children and love them. James 3:17 reminds us that God wants to be gentle with us. This is our model for fathers. *"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy & good fruits, impartial& sincere."* We have precious, impressionable children to love.

Second, avoid inducing fear or irritating them. *Ephesians 6:4 tells us, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."* Keep track of when your children are

angry at you. Is it because of the way you talk with them, your tone of voice or what? Men, it might be our style that's the problem and not the content or specific issue. Are we dictators giving orders or are we teachers, helping our children & grandchildren think and evaluate?

Third, regularly choose to stay at home, with your family. It's so easy to leave, to run, and to desert our wife and children. One statistic suggested 70% of married men under age 40 expected they'd have an affair at some point. This lack of solid commitment is bad for our children. We are asked to guarantee our love, which is not just words, but behavior, like God is toward us. *Psalms 36:5 tells us, “Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.*

Fourth, Be intimate with your kids, and caring. The tendency of many men is to want to fix things; to find out what went wrong; to teach; to discipline; and so on. But often it's simply better to listen and give them a hug. It's important to give time to just be with them. Hang around time, where you just be together is very important. It may seem like a waste of time, but it really isn't.

Let's look at the example of Jesus when it comes to intimacy. He calls us to follow him. In the same way we want our children to follow us – not in careers as much as in growing in the personal traits and character of a Christian.

John 15:4-5 gives us Jesus' model of intimacy with him. *“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* This is an example of what we are to strive for as parents.

Quantity time with our children is just as important as quality time. It's essential to be available for our children. That's often when the real important conversations and short life

lessons take place. In all relationships, especially with our children, when they know they are loved, by our behavior, they usually will listen better, more often and be respectful.

Both my wife and I had fathers who traveled a lot, for the church. So before we were married, we agreed we would not take jobs that involved travel. We were both stay at home parents when our children were home. We hung around and didn't apply for some attractive jobs.

Fifth, men, it's important to encourage, support cheerlead, reassure, and inspire your children and the young people in your lives. This is so important. Don't have the habit of criticizing them. This has to be done verbally as well as materially.

When every one of my children was young, I had this game I played with them. I would hold them and say things like: “You have the best looking ears of any 6 month old around.” “The way you shared your toys with your friend was awesome.” “I liked the way you were kind when you needed to defend yourself.” “The way you included that new kid was being like Jesus.” “You are the most intelligent grade three kid I know.” “I'm impressed with the hard work you put in to get the grade you did.” You get the idea.

Be your children's greatest cheerleader. Just like God lifts us up. Now when I start with a list of this kind of cheerleading, and my children are over age 30, before the second line is off my lips, they all start blushing, have a big smile, and say “Dad!” Children of any age – have to hear the words. Saying “I love you” is important but not enough. Be specific in your encouragement.

The Bible is full of encouragement from God. *Isaiah 41:10. “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

Jesus in John 14:27 assures us, “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*” So we need to constantly do the same for our children.

Sixth, provide for your children. We all know stories about being the bank for our children. We know it’s not good to give them all they want. But it’s good to encourage them a little with experiences like sports, music lessons and other things. In *Genesis 50:21, God promises, “So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.*”

I remember when one of our children asked for a meeting with my wife and me. When we sat down we were asked for money to go to graduate school. We said no. We had provided enough money for a bachelor’s degree and a car. So he only had a small loan for university. We could not afford to help with cash to get a doctorate degree. But we were happy for him to live at home for free for the first two years. He had free rent, utilities and all the food he wanted – from us. Giving too much to your children is just as bad as not providing enough.

Earlier this same child was so desperate to get away from us when he first went to university. But when he came back home at Christmas, he had a different attitude toward his parents. He discovered we were not such bad parents after all. Plus he found out that we were helping him with his university costs more than many of his new friends. So it may take some time for a child to realize how good a parent you are. And now in later years – we can give cash gifts to all our children – to pay off debts, build their safety net, to come see us, or fund retirement.

Seventh, be there for your children when things are tough and go through bad events with them. You might have to adjust your schedule. You might need to do some tough discipline. You might have to do something that makes you uncomfortable. For example my mother bravely went to a math teacher, who

had a strict and mean reputation, and said, “Can you check your math because my son thinks he should have a B & not a C on his report card.” The math teacher discovered he had calculated wrong and changed my grade. Hurrah Mom! And hurrah male math teacher!

Be loyal to them in action to help them prepare for their future. *Psalm 27:10 promises us: “Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.”* So regardless of who abandons us, betrays us, or hurts us, the Lord is ready, willing and able to embrace us. We need to be like that for our children and spouse when they have troubled friendships and hard times and make mistakes. We should not always rescue them, but be there for them.

Eighth, Love your children’s mother. *The Bible tells us in Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”* Treat her like a treasure. Help around the house. Your wife is not your housekeeper, laundress, dishwasher and cook. A few years ago I lived with some single young men and the topic of how to find a wife came up from time to time. One piece of advice I gave was, “Watch how that girl you are interested in treats her dad. That’s how she is going to treat you if you marry her.” One of the best ways to raise a child is to love your spouse. The best teacher is your actions and your attitude toward the woman in your life. Your children’s security is wrapped up in how tight the partnership is between mom and dad.

Ninth - Be involved in church and ministry. I can’t say enough that we teach by our actions more than our words. Children see what we do and that sticks more than what we say. We can preach and teach all we want – nag your children, but it’s what we do, how we live out our commitment to follow Jesus that comes through. We are the best witness for Jesus for your children. *Matthew 5:16 tells us, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

We could say a lot more about fathers. This list is just a start and each of these ideas could be a whole sermon in themselves. I could talk about the importance of doing things together like camping, gardening, playing, working together and so on. But let's stop with a 10th learning or instruction.

Number 10 is, forgive your father. And parents, forgive your children. To have good relationships it's crucial to be a forgiving person. To be the best parent possible, you need to be able to forgive your father.

Why? Because he's human. We all sin. You are human also. This means you are a lot like your dad because humans are flawed. And, being human, you will require an extra dose of God's grace to be able to forgive him.

Another reason to forgive your father is: Your father is the product of a fallen world and flawed parents and grandparents. Whatever your father's sins, he too is a child of God. And You will eventually want mercy too. Therefore, you would do well to show mercy. **Jesus said, "Forgive us...as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Matthew 6:12).**

Why is it important to forgive? Forgiveness opens the grace channel. But resentment and anger clogs it up and shuts off the daily supply of God's grace you and I continually need.

Pastor Gary Inrig writes, "Forgiveness is ultimately an act of the will, not a stirring of the emotions. For a Christ-follower, it is a choice to obey God and let it go. This is an inward choice that produces a declaration given, a promise spoken: 'I forgive you.' When I speak those words, I declare that the issue between us is dead and buried. I'm saying that I will not rehearse it, review it, or renew it. When it comes to my mind, I will take it to the Lord and to the foot of the cross, not to you."

I hope these 10 points about being a father are helpful to you. God the Father is our example. Being a father is the biggest responsibility in

your life. I wish schools and churches gave more teaching about parenting. May your children of any age, at this time next year, say, "Have you noticed that Dad has become a better father this last year."

Proverbs 23:25 tells us, May your father and mother rejoice; may she who gave you birth be joyful!

The Message version of this verse goes like this. ***Listen with respect to the father who raised you, and when your mother grows old, don't neglect her. Buy truth—don't sell it for love or money; buy wisdom, buy education, buy insight. Parents rejoice when their children turn out well; wise children become proud parents. So make your father happy! Make your mother proud!***

Happy Father's Day!

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 (NIV)

⁷ Instead, we were like young children^[a] among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children,
⁸ so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

⁹ Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.¹⁰ You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.¹¹ For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,¹² encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.