

7 Things You Should Remember This Father's Day

"... you ... honor your sons above Me" (1 Samuel 2:29b). Eli was an indulgent father, and God held him accountable for it.

"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! If only I could have given my death in your stead, Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam. 18:33). David could be a wonderful father at times and an absentee parent at other times. A lot like us.

Often when doing the funeral of an older man, I'll see adult children showing varying degrees of love and sadness and even anger. So, sometimes in the service, I will say, "Fathers are human. Sometimes they get it right and leave great memories and bless their families. And sometimes they get it wrong, just as the rest of us do. May I suggest that you appreciate your dad for what he did right and forgive him for what he failed to get right. Surely, you will want your children to do that with you."

Love your dad. Appreciate what he got right. Forgive him where he didn't.

On Facebook yesterday, I wrote of a scary/unforgettable memory concerning our oldest son, Neil. He was 3 years old and had jumped to me in the swimming pool where I, the pastor, had taken a bunch of teenagers. Keep in mind this was at the deep end of the pool. Eleven feet deep! As I caught him, something unexpected happened. His weight and momentum took us down ... and down ... and down. It was so frightening. I kept thinking, *I'm drowning my child!* and *I'm going to have to pump water out of his lungs!* Finally—after what seemed to be minutes—my feet touched the bottom, and I sprang up. As we came out of the water and I lifted him onto the side of the pool, he said, "Whew, Dad! That was a long time!" He was fine, but I was a

basket case. So scary.

At the conclusion of my post, Neil wrote something to the effect that he always trusted his dad and mentioned a number of instances when he had pushed the envelope, and I had been there. And then, his younger brother chimed in.

“Dad, do you remember the first time you took me sledding?”

I did not. “Son, you’ll have to remind me.”

“On a rare snow day” (we lived in Mississippi) “you borrowed a sled, and we drove to the Cockrell’s because they had a nice hill. You parked the car at the end of the driveway and told me to go down the hill first—but I was afraid I would crash into the car. You said, ‘Go ahead, and I’ll catch you.’ Well, you may have slowed me enough to prevent serious injury, but I ended up with my head under the car.”

I said, “Wow. I don’t remember that.”

He responded, “I can’t believe I trusted you” and added a smiley-face.

Marty was funning me, but the memory is still alive and well in his heart and mind, and that was surely over 40 years back. (I’m so sorry, my beloved son! Forgive me.)

Love your dad. Appreciate what he got right. Forgive him for the times he didn’t.

Every dad has a spotted record. Sometimes he is a hero, a champion, and sometimes he seems selfish and small-minded. Sometimes he is Superman, at other times not just Clark Kent but Lex Luthor, maybe.

Father’s Day sermons are a good time to remind people to appreciate their fathers, not because they are perfect but because they got so much of this right. After God took my dad in 2007, the best cure for my grief which could be

overwhelming was to start giving thanks for all the things he got right. There were so many of those.

In the last couple of years of my dad's life—he lived to be almost 96—he was remembering something his mother had done that had hurt him deeply. He was 18 and the youngest of what would eventually be 12 children. His mother had made him leave home because Dad and his next brother, Marion, nicknamed Gip, were constantly fighting. "Why did she kick me out?" Dad would say. "I was the serious one, the only one working full time and bringing in a paycheck. I actually paid off the family house with what I was earning in the coal mines." He would add, "It just wasn't fair."

And because the memory kept plaguing dad, some of us began to try to reason with him. I said, "Dad, Grandma had a houseful of kids. Her life was hectic. She needed some peace. So, cut her some slack." No use. He was still hurt.

So I said, "Dad, you were able to live on your own. You had a job and an income. Gip would not have been able to take care of himself. In a way, Grandma paid you a compliment." No use. It didn't get through to him.

Finally, I said, "Well, Dad, let's suppose she did do wrong, that she made a mistake. Every parent makes mistakes, right? We've all made them. And we hope our children will forgive us." I paused and said, "Dad, did you ever make any mistakes in raising your children?" Now, bear in mind that I am his son. I know the answer to this question.

Dad said, "Not that I can think of." I wanted to say, "What? Dad, do you remember the time ..." but I said nothing. His memory was deceiving him.

Eventually, the memory went away, just as the mind began shutting down in other ways.

Looking back, I have wondered if perhaps Dad felt abandoned by

his father, who apparently was not in this conversation at all. His mother is running him away from home, and his father says nothing?

So, here are my suggestions and conclusions to this matter.

One. Cut your father some slack. Give him room to be human. Make Psalm 103:14c part of your theology. "We are dust." God knew He was getting no bargain when He saved us. He who made us knows we are made of humble stuff. When we sin, the only one surprised is us.

Two. Love your father the way he is. If we demanded perfection in those we love before we thanked and appreciated them, we'd have no one to love. No one is perfect. No one gets it right all the time. Romans 3:10 and 3:23 are true of you and me and our fathers as well.

Three. If your father is alive, tell him a good memory, something he did that blesses you to this day.

Four. If your father is no longer alive, even so, spend some time listing in your mind times he got it right, good things he did. In almost every instance, you'll be able to think of those.

Five. If your father was a monster—and sad to say, that is sometimes true—then thank God that your heavenly Father is there for you and that He is a constant in your life.

Six. Forgive him. If you need to, express that in so many words. In most cases, you won't need to say it, but can simply show by your constant love that the past is behind you.

Seven. If you are a father, determine to do your best to get this right. That would involve many things, including:

- taking the family to church and setting an example of a faithful man of God who reads his Bible, sings those hymns in church, gives an offering and prays.

- teaching the children. Tell them lessons you learned, particularly those learned the hard way.
- As your children age, ask them how you're doing as a father. Listen to what they say. Don't do anything just because they want it, but use their response to start a conversation with your wife on this subject.
- Ask your wife how you can be a better father.
- Constantly pray for your children. Pray for them at school, relating to friends, choosing best friends, studying and learning and growing. And then, pray for their future—for the spouse awaiting them somewhere out there, the career and so on.
- Subscribe to Christian magazines like *Home Life*. The articles will often be helpful in showing you small ways to make a big difference.
- As your children grow into adulthood, find a time to ask them individually, "Do you have any bad memories of a time when I let you down? or did something that hurt you?" I once asked my three children this. The oldest pointed out that I was often gone on his birthday. February 6 would be just about the time of our denomination's annual evangelism conference, which as a pastor, I felt I needed to attend. The only thing I could do at this late date was to apologize to him and assure him of my love.
- Never hesitate to tell your children of any age: "I love you," "I'm proud of you," and "You are my beloved son/daughter in whom I delight" (Mark 1:11).

I'm thankful for my dad. And so thankful for Neil, Marty and Carla. And so in love with their children: Leah, Jessica, Grant, Abigail, Erin, Darilyn, JoAnne and Jack.

God is good. {eoa}

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