

Man in the Mirror: A Son's Guide to Father's Day

Definitions

Mo · ther's Day (mutherz day) n. A day devoted to honoring moms.

Fath · er's Day (fätherz day) n. A day to beat up men for not doing a better job!

Guess what? Not this year. This year, let's bless our fathers!

"What?" you say. "You obviously don't know my father!" Don't have to. Heard it before. Been through it myself.

In 1926, when my dad was two years old, the youngest of four children, his father abandoned him. It is something from which our family lineage has still not fully recovered. The impact of a father, for better or for worse, is felt forward for many generations.

My grandfather, whom I never met nor ever even seen his picture, contacted my dad when I was in high school. My dad didn't want anything to do with him. I asked my dad, "Why didn't you let him come see you?"

My dad said, "I was only two when he left. I never knew the man. He didn't want anything to do with me then, so I don't want anything to do with him now." Back then, as a high schooler, I didn't know what to say. Today, I do, but it's too late. My dad has passed away.

Breaking the Cycle

My dad wanted to break the cycle and, in many ways, he did. He taught me integrity, the value of hard work, and how to respect a woman. I will always be grateful. But my dad also

let me down in some key areas. He didn't want to, but he did. He was a good man, but he had a lot to overcome. He suffered for the sins of his own father. The Bible puts it this way:

The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation (Ex. 34:6-7).

My dad tried to break the cycle and became a leader in our church. But, regrettably, our church didn't put a strong emphasis on building godly men, husbands, and fathers. As a result, we dropped out of church when he was 40 and I was in the 10th grade, the oldest of four boys.

Our entire family lineage is still reeling from that decision: two high school dropouts (I was one of them), drug addiction, alcoholism, employment problems, and divorce. I even have a brother who died of a heroin overdose.

One reason I'm so passionate about helping men become Godly men, husbands, and fathers is because of what I've seen God do in my own family line. By God's grace, I became a follower of Jesus in my early 20s. Since then, everyone in our family, except one brother, has put their faith in Jesus.

Patsy and I have been married for 30 years. My children can never remember a day they didn't know and love Jesus Christ. So, "Dad, if you can hear me, thanks for all you did. We did break the cycle, and we did it because of your determination. I have been able to finish in my generation what you started in your generation."

Still, I can't help but wonder, how would our family have been different if our church had a strong program to disciple men? I will never know, but your church can.

Your Church On Father's Day: If you really want to do something significant, why not announce on Father's Day that your church is committed to build a strong disciple-making program to build godly men, husbands, fathers, and boys? Attend a leadership training course at Man in the Mirror's Leadership Training Center.

A Father's Day Sermon: Pastors might preach a message on Father's Day about the crucial role that fathers play in family life. Pick an uplifting title, like, "Thanks, Dad!" or "Why I Love my Dad" or "Why Being a Dad Is Cool." Raise the bar on what's at stake when men fail. Send me an email, put "Father's Day statistics" in the subject line, and I will send you some great stats for your sermon (patrickmorley@).

Encourage your men for trying. Cite specific examples of men in your church who are great dads. Give men permission to make fathering a top priority—even if it means they don't spend as much time on church business.

Reconciling Sons and Fathers

Ed can only remember his father touching him once. When he was seven, his dad put his hand on Ed's knee to comfort him. What's so amazing about this story is not the absence of physical affection, but that a single touch would still be so vivid seventy years later!

When Ed turned sixty he went to his father's house and rang the doorbell. When his dad opened the door, he reached out and hugged his father. He said, "It was like hugging a cement telephone pole, but I'm so glad I did it. It's the only hug I ever had from him."

A little boy who grows up without an involved, affectionate, affirming dad can carry a lot of hurt and bitterness. If you had an absent, preoccupied, passive, or mean dad, you are probably an angry man.

If you had a father who let you down, you have some choices to make (if you have not already done so): You can repeat the sins of your father, or you can break the cycle. You can carry around your pain and bitterness, or you can forgive and redeem your family line.

Have you let God set you free, or are you still bound to the past by the sins of your father or father's father? This Father's Day, you can set your entire family lineage on a course of godliness and reconciliation for generations to come.

Practical Things to Set Your Family Free

Sons to Living Fathers: If your father is living, take him to lunch on Father's Day—maybe just the two of you. Prepare a list of things you appreciate and a summary of the ways you feel let down. Read the list of things you appreciate to him. Give examples. Then, tell him about the pain you have felt. Talk about it. He will probably express regret.

Regardless of his response tell him, "Dad, I thank you for being my dad. You mean so much to me. I forgive you for the past. I love you very much, and I want us to have a good relationship. Why don't we plan to spend more time together? Maybe we can have lunch or breakfast once every (week, month, two months, quarterly)."

Sons to Deceased Fathers: Write your father a letter. Spend a few days jotting down notes, then sit down on Father's Day and write it out. Tell him what you appreciate, the good things he passed along to you, all the things you miss, what you regret, the places where you think he let you down. Then, by God's grace, thank him where you can, and forgive him for everything else. If emotion comes, don't hold it back. A good cry can heal many hurts. Let it all go. When you are done, ceremoniously burn the letter as a symbol of putting the past behind you once and for all. If you can't let it go, consider

a few sessions with a professional Christian counselor. You don't have to spend the rest of your life with a seed of bitterness eating away at you.

Sons to Fathers-In-Law: My father-in-law has been my encourager, mentor, and champion. Why not send a special letter of gratitude to your father-in-law for welcoming you into his family, giving you the hand of his daughter, supporting you through the years, and whatever else you can say that expresses gratitude? If possible, consider going to lunch and presenting your letter in person.

Never Knew Your Dad? Write God a letter with all the questions you have about your father. Tell God how much you miss not knowing or not having a dad. Thank God for the men who have filled in gaps. Ask God to fill in everything else. Consider finding a younger man who doesn't have a dad in his life and get your families together on Father's Day.

A Final Thought

Any Christian counselor will tell you, "There is something about a man's relationship with his father that touches every aspect of his life." Indeed, ask a group of men on a retreat to discuss, "What was your relationship with your father like?" and you will soon have a room full of blubbers—many because their dads were so encouraging, and the rest because they don't feel like their dads loved them or were proud of them.

So, this is not a message about how to be a good dad on Father's Day, but a good son. Bless your father this year. If you can reconcile with your past, you won't be doomed to repeat the sins of your father or father's father. You will be a good dad to your own kids. You will have broken the cycle. You will be free.

Application

Share this article with other men and then talk about it. What ideas had the biggest impact on you? Why? What is a next step you feel compelled to take?

Pray about your relationships with your father (and father-in-law). How will you bless them this Father's Day?

Patrick Morley is founder and CEO of Man in the Mirror. After building one of Florida's 100 largest privately held companies, in 1991, he founded Man in the Mirror, a non-profit organization to help men find meaning and purpose in life. Dr. Morley is the bestselling author of *The Man in the Mirror*, *No Man Left Behind*, *Dad in the Mirror*, and *A Man's Guide to the Spiritual Disciplines*.

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