

Matthew Barnett: Fatherhood Can Be Joyous, But It Isn't for the Fainthearted

As fathers, we have a unique calling to lead our children in the right direction. Each of our children is different, and each will answer a calling that is perhaps unexpected.

And, of course, all of them are experiencing a world right now that is unlike anything we've ever imagined.

With so much at stake, accepting the responsibility of fatherhood is not for the fainthearted. Yet when we do, we find our energies result in a tremendous reward—joy. Jesus' disciple John wrote, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

Who would have thought that experiencing joy requires so much energy? Today we're leading our children through an economic minefield, not to mention a nation rocked by school shootings and a meteoric rise in depression and anxiety for school-aged kids isolated for too long during COVID.

Yet, experiencing the joy of fatherhood is like nothing else on earth.

My own father's life has been one great adventure. My father, Pastor Tommy Barnett, will always be a once-in-a-lifetime leader who continues through every turbulent decade to be a reminder to every generation of fathers that hope is always alive.

Living under my dad's leadership stretched and challenged me. He was the one who taught me to put myself in situations that confronted my heart and shook me out of my comfort zone.

Growing up in my dad's house, I knew what he required of me

but never knew what my father experienced. I learned the responsibility of fatherhood from my father, but I have discovered the joy of fathering on my own.

How many of us in the past few weeks have watched a child walking across a stage to receive a diploma or award? The swelling inside, that feeling of, "That's my kid," the enlargement of our own souls and humbling of what happened when we often felt so ill-equipped—it is like nothing else on earth.

My prayer this Father's Day is for more fathers to discover the joy of fatherhood.

We call God "our Father," and it's no coincidence. The way He loves, protects and provides for us is the same role He has graciously given us—the role of loving, protecting and providing for those we love.

Dads nationwide must remain steadfast as they lead their children through the perilous times we live in today. I pray that they meet the challenges of each child's unique personality and calling, so that they can see the day when each child walks into the destiny God has prepared for them.

For fathers who are struggling on this Father's Day, I implore you to resist apathy and passivity. We've all seen the data that shows a healthy father is critical for a child to grow up and live a fulfilling life. Your love, your leadership and your wisdom is non-negotiable. So, do the hard work of putting yourself in situations that confront your heart and challenge your comfort zone. If there was ever a generation that needed you to be bold and brave, it's your kids and their entire generation today.

I encourage you to be a father figure to someone who needs a dad, too. Spend extra time with your child or another child near you and find a way to be part of his or her daily growth. I encourage you to continue making sacrifices, and commit time

and attention to your family as well as to your surrounding community.

With God as our example, we will find new ways to be the dads their families need. We must be willing to be vessels of God's love, a patient and sacrificial love. Be willing to look beyond the four walls of your own home and reach those in our communities who desperately need a father. Fathering another man's child by exercising the spirit of fatherhood—which is the Spirit of God Himself—can be as gratifying and produce the same joy as doing it for our own children.

Fatherhood is the best gift I've ever been given. Yes, it has required more energy and responsibility than I ever imagined. But being a father has produced more joy than I ever knew possible.

Matthew Barnett *is the co-founder of the Los Angeles Dream Center and senior pastor of Angelus Temple. The Los Angeles Dream Center is a faith-based non-profit dedicated to transforming the lives of individuals and families in Los Angeles through residential and outreach programs.*

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