

The Best Fathers Are Present but not Perfect

My perspective on fatherhood might seem to some as though it comes from an odd place. My grandfather died when my dad was just 9 years old, and even before that, my grandfather wasn't around a lot.

My dad didn't really have a father, but that didn't define him. He was an amazing man, and even more, he was an amazing father to me. Looking back now, I see how determined he was to give me everything he'd never had. I hope my kids will remember me as even a fraction of the dad my father was to me. His imprint was indelible.

Becoming a father was one of the greatest blessings I could ever have imagined, but I can also admit that it was more than a little intimidating, especially because our journey to parenting wasn't at all the way I expected it to happen.

When my wife, Denise, first floated the idea of adoption, I said, "No!" Looking back, I was afraid of how hard it would be. I was afraid I'd fail, that I'd suffer or that our children would suffer. Adoption seemed to set the bar a little higher.

Nearly 20 years later, I'm thankful God didn't leave me in my fear. God gave us the faith to step out and adopt, and what a gift our kids have been.

The truth is that over these 20 years, nearly every one of the things I feared has come true: I found out that I am inadequate. Some days, it was more difficult than I could have imagined. But now I can see how silly my fears really were and how completely I misunderstood fatherhood.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on

your own understanding,” Proverbs 3:5-7 (ESV) tells us. “In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.”

I knew that passage before I became a father. I knew it, but I didn't understand it the way I do now. Becoming a father to our children meant trusting the Lord to support me in my frailty, to guide me when I couldn't see the next step.

In my struggle to be a good dad, I often fall into trying to shape my kids' futures. I try to protect them from suffering, be perfect for them and will things to happen. But it is in those moments that I fail as a parent. And in those failures, I have learned much about the character of God.

In those struggles, God is present. God showed His strength to me in my own weakness. He taught me humility. He taught me more perfect love. And He gave me the gift of fatherhood as the crucible to do much of it.

That's part of what I misunderstood about parenting, especially parenting through adoption. We don't have to be heroes. We don't have to fix everything or produce children who check all the boxes and get it all right.

We are graced to be stewards of a tremendous gift. God asks us, through parenthood, to entrust our children to Him. He asks us to trust that He loves them more perfectly and more steadfastly than we ever could and that He will provide for them when we no longer can.

In parenthood, God gives us the joy and awe of life with children in the same moment He gives us a path to greater humility, obedience and grace. We just need to be present, every day, with a heart of service.

That's what I tell myself, and it's what I tell every father I've helped prepare for adoption through Lifeline. Perfection

isn't a job requirement for fatherhood—the humility to follow Jesus is. {eoa}

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