

God's advice for fathers

Dan Nelson – pastor

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Father's Day is this Sunday and I am looking forward to a day spent with my family. A Sunday sermon, a card, a great lunch, a couple of phone calls, and some family fun will fill most of the day for me. I tend to draw out days like this as long as I can, so we will all stay up late to watch a movie. Then the day will eventually be over and I will have to wait another year.

I heard one dad say that Father's Day is the only day when his family listens to him; he tells them not to spend too much on a Father's Day gift — and they don't. Compared to the similar holiday honoring moms, many observe that this event doesn't carry the same boom. AT&T says that Mother's Day has the highest call volume of the year. Father's Day has its own record; it has the most "collect calls."

I want to make an unfortunate distinction with you, however, between fatherhood and being a dad. While it doesn't take that much effort to become a biological father, it takes tremendous effort and difficulty to be a "dad." Being a dad is a 24/7 challenge with rewards and responsibilities. This distinction is not the ideal model of God's design but a reality of our fallen world.

As a father of four children, I know very intimately the difficulties that dads face. Real life is sprinkled with proud moments and painful memories and a whole lot of simply "being there" in between. God tells us to train up our children in the things of God and not to frustrate them. It is quite possible for a dad to frustrate his children. Many people I have spoken to have struggles in their relationship with their dad. The most common complaints I hear are, "My dad never tells me that he loves me" and "He never listens to me." A father can easily withhold his love and affection, which creates frustration, bitterness and an emotional stranglehold on their life. It is surprisingly common for a father to be so involved in work or other pursuits that he is uninvolved in the life of his son or daughter. Did you know that it is possible to be physically present and at the same time be emotionally and spiritually absent? Ironically, most of these fathers seem to have no idea of the disconnect.

Part of the answer is given to us in the first part of the verse; train up your children in the things of God. To "train up" implies proactive involvement and intentional engagement with my child. It also implies that involvement with their dads should be an uplifting experience for these children. And while it feels so great to throw the ball and help them with their homework, this instruction says that I am called to address the spiritual needs of my children as well by engaging them in the things of God. I personally see a huge disconnect here. It just doesn't seem that there are very many dads willing to answer the challenge. Many men do a lot of really phenomenal things, but to teach one's child the ways of God implies a deep heart-level shift for the father himself in submitting to God and learning and living differently. This rubs against priorities, presupposed philosophies and lifestyle choices. For some, it seems too much to ask.

Studies show that the most influential societal ill that has wreaked havoc on our country and culture is absentee fathers. Most of these are men who produce offspring only to shirk their responsibilities for the sake of convenience. They ultimately end up living a life that no one envies and

having children who resent them.

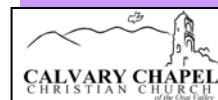
You might find it surprising that Jesus modeled for us what it means to be a dad. It sounds kind of funny at first since Jesus himself did not produce any physical children. (Despite what hype might be spun to sell you a book or movie ticket.) But since the whole role of family originated in the mind of God, and he chooses to represent himself to us as our heavenly father, he also gives us a model. Jesus explains that he is the perfect reflection of our father. So, as dads, we can look to Jesus, not only as the author and finisher of our faith, but as our model and teacher regarding how to be a good dad. So what can we learn from him?

I submit to you seven aspects of fatherhood that I have learned from Jesus. Dads are practical; they deal with real life, they know their influence is vital to their children and society and they stand strong in their responsibility. Dads are purposeful; they have clear intentions to disciple their children and create a legacy. They prepare and plan to accomplish these goals and are not afraid to humble themselves and get help from others. Dads are patient when life gets crazy or unpredictable. The Bible says that love is patient. Dads are present; if they aren't there when something important happens, nothing will totally replace that. Dads promote; they lift, encourage and empower their children and don't hold them under their heavy hand forever. Dads provide for their children, not only food, shelter and clothing, but also with teaching, training, coaching and counseling addressing the whole child including the spiritual needs. And dads protect their children, physically and emotionally, with comfort and strength.

So as we reflect on cards and barbecues for this Sunday and then wait another year for the big day to roll around again, let's accept the everyday high calling to be a dad!

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:45am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
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