



## Understanding Dad “Jump-starting Fatherhood”

Here’s the truth: Number one, there are almost no “man caves;” most all Dads share space with the rest of the family. Number two, today’s Dad is more involved with the kids than ever. I call that, going in the right direction. Nearly all of this change came with the New Testament and Christ. With the coming of the New

Testament and Christ, polygamy is gone, women are no longer property. You can’t buy one and be in compliance with the New Testament. “There is no longer Jew nor Greek, bond or free, male nor female –all are one (equal) in Christ” (Galatians 3:28). I, for one, resent the idea of getting “extra points” just for being a man –I feel that diminishes my value as a person. With Christ, marriage becomes a partnership and a friendship. Parenting becomes a mutual responsibility. There is an awakening, so that Matthew Henry writes, “Eve was not taken out of Adam’s head to top him, neither out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected by him, and near his heart to be loved by him.” It was quoted often by Charles Wesley.

The most prominent analogy used in the Bible to help us understand the nature and character of God is that of a father. “Our father who art in heaven.” “God our father.” When fatherhood breaks down, so does our ability to relate to, and understand God. A great part of the ministry of fathers toward children is to provide a good model of the word *father*; a model that God can use. Without this, there is bound to be a gap in our understanding of God.

Part of who we are is bound up in our fathers. We cannot understand ourselves without a reasonable level of understanding of our fathers. Fathers are more difficult to understand than mothers. For one thing, in past societies, they were not around as much; they were either off to work or war. For another thing, they have, in many families, been given the role of last resort disciplinarians. Everyone knows what it means to hear, “wait till your father gets home.” If your family was set up that way, this was someone who you would rather **not** see come home; this was someone to avoid. All the major research shows men to be more isolated from other people, including the family, than women. Most people don’t know as much about their fathers as they do their mothers. They don’t understand them quite as well.

“Honor your father and mother -this is the first commandment with a promise: So that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth. And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:2-4). Don’t become a “button-pusher” Dad! Don’t become a “button pusher” Dad.

***Understanding our father is a project well worth the effort.*** The promise connected with it is a longer, better adjusted, smoother, life for us. Many emotional problems stem from a lack of understanding and adjustment to our parents, especially our fathers. The Bible has good advice when it connects our own well being in life to our understanding of our parents. What is it like for fathers?

To understand our fathers, we need to look at conditions when they were growing up, when they were fathering, and we need to remember the stories they told us. My father, for example, grew up in the depression without a father. He cared for me in the two decades of the 1940's and the 1950's. He started work when he was still a boy; the work was physically difficult and the days were long; the result was still poverty and struggle. I personally, think it is wrong for people to make light of the hardships of that particular generation. When we make light of the stories, we push our parents away from ourselves. "Making light" sends a clear message to them; we don't understand them; we don't intend to understand them. I believe the stories were true, even if a little exaggerated. Dad's view of life was that it was hard and children needed to be toughened to survive it. Toughening kids for life was a way of loving them. Kids were a product, and he poured endless hours into his product. Even now it is hard for me to believe the amount of time he spent teaching skills and science to his children. If you knew general science, you could solve any problem.

But the story that tells the most about my father is a story from World War II, Navy Boot Camp. Great effort was being made to ready thousands of men for the war effort. Survival of entire nations of people was at stake. Wake-up time was at 5:00 am; the first item was track and calisthenics. After a number of times around, one young man dropped on the track; he was forced to get back up and keep running, where upon he dropped to the track a second time and died. You cannot be part of such a experience without having it impact on your own view of life and fatherhood. Another story he used to tell involved a training exercise in which one crawled through a swamp with live ammunition flying two foot over the ground; to stand up was to be killed. No wonder so many people of that era could not figure out their fathers. When dad came home from World War II, he came home to two little children, not two little babies. Who was this man we had never seen before?

***What does God expect of fathers?*** What can fathers give; what should they be like? Perhaps we can take the Bible this morning and redraw the plan for fatherhood. Maybe we have taken for granted the validity of our own society, call it Christian or not, and forgotten the kind of picture God expects us, as men, to paint of fatherhood.

*First*, God expects fathers to give. The most important thing we need to give children is security. That is what our heavenly father wants us to model for our children. We are secure in Him. Certainly this includes providing for our children. "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will you Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?" (Matthew 7:9-11).

I want to suggest that giving security to our children goes far beyond the provision of food and shelter. Children also need to know that their *real home* is secure; their "people home," not just their "house home." They need emotional security just as much as they need physical security. Ephesians 5:25, says, "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it." The best thing you can do for your children is to love their mother, and make sure they know that you do. If the people who love them, love each other, then, they are perfectly safe.

In her research on emotional problems in children, Virginia Satir cites this as the number one need in children: "The striking observation was that when the parents were emotionally close, more invested in each other than either was in the child, the child improved. When *either* parent became more emotionally invested in the child than in the other parent, the child immediately and automatically regressed. When the parents were

emotionally close, they could do no wrong in their "management" of the child. The child responded well to firmness, permissiveness, punishment, "talking it out," or any other management approach. When the parents were "emotionally divorced," any and all "management approaches" were equally unsuccessful." <sup>1</sup> "Husbands love your wives" --that is not as simple as lot of men would like to make it.

In general, men are physically stronger than women. When men live apart from God (including Christian men), that strength becomes a curse to women. When God has no power in their lives, they use that strength to intimidate and dominate Mom. It is what is described as the curse on women in Genesis chapter three --a "ruling husband." In the true Christian home Dad no longer uses his physical advantage to make Mom into a child of sort, but cooperates with Christ in the "lifting of the curse." We see this in Galatians 3:13, where the effect of the cross is to lift the curse on mankind. The real curse on man is the way he treats others, and the way he treats the earth itself when Christ has no influence in his life. In such cases, strength, itself, operates in the place of God. That is a curse. That is what we see in the animal kingdom.

How Dad loves Mom will have a great affect on the kids. Husbands are not to love their wives for their wives sake alone, but for their children's sake. How so?

If Mom is not treated fairly, then there is not a child in the world who will grow up thinking that this is a safe world. The most important thing in a child's life is how Mom and Dad go together.

***There are three kinds of Dads in the world --variations of all three operate in the church.*** All three types have written their own theology.

***First, there is the "good old boy Dad" who treats Mom poorly.*** A recent example is a judge who refused to write a restraining order because, he said, "ever woman needs a good pounding now and then." These Dad's tell jokes demeaning women right out in the open --women are to be kept in subjection and made fun of. They are a "Christian version" of the Talaban.

***Second, there is the Chauvinist Dad who treats Mom well --if not royally.*** In the past, we commended this Dad in the same manner that we commended the masters who treated their slaves well. What more could anyone want? This Dad will only tell jokes demeaning women to small groups in a whispering tone. This dad will say things like, "You know how women are;" but, only to other men. With this Dad, it is only right to treat women well --but, they still need to know their place. It's just better for them to take it voluntarily. They bring roses; but they don't pick up the dishes and they leave their dirty underwear on the floor. **They will open up car doors to make up for not opening the other doors in life that might give Mom a better chance at achieving her dream.**

***Third, the Christian Dad who treats Mom fair and as an equal.*** This is the Dad who does not resort to strength or privilege, and cooperates with God and does his part to lift the curse on Mom. The kids will notice which Dad you are --and they will hold you responsible for the way you treat their Mom. In case you haven't noticed, women in history and in much of our world today, have had to "put up with" an awful lot.

None of this has much of anything to do with the word "macho," which I take to be some boyish attempt of grown men to demonstrate their maleness in sometimes weird ways. Tim "the Tool-man" Taylor is a good

example of macho. Jill, of course, thinks it is cute at times and a nuisance at others.

Of course, kids don't have all of this figured out; however, they do feel every bit of it. If I were a woman, guess which man I would want to marry? So, if Dad loves Mom, he will not only treat her well, he will also treat her fair --he will make sure that he does not become an accessory in reinforcing the curse upon her. So, that when the children look at Mom and Dad working together, they will see a demonstration of equality in Christ as the chapter concludes in Galatians 3:28. They will not see an obvious attempt of one to overpower other.

Maybe you're saying, "Your right, but it's too late, we're divorced." No, it's not too late. Fatherhood is not just a biological idea. In fact, biology is the smallest part of it. When Paul introduced Timothy he said, "But Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel" (Philippians 2:22). You be the best step-father that you can be. Men, whatever fathering we provide, we must remember that our children are really God's children. Fatherhood is a service and ministry for God.

I believe that fatherhood and motherhood are not exclusive domains, but overlap and combine to create a full parenting image that Children can then envision as they pray "our Father who art in heaven." After all, no one thinks that God has gender.

*Second*, God expects fathers to feel. This is where we have lost the most. In the past, war and work have driven us away from what we love the most; we became disconnected; never knowing how to express our love. Something told us we needed to stop hugging our children when they were seven. After that, we could never hug our boys again; they seemed to know that. A cruel social system locked us out. In many ways we were alone, except perhaps for the help of one woman who shared feelings with us.

When I was a young father, I saw something that changed my life. I saw a young lady in her early twenties, who was in great distress, sobbing uncontrollably, tears streaming down her face, run to her father, hug him and hold on for dear life. There were no wise words; it was a picture that told me the story of fatherhood. After I saw that, I understood a lot of things a little better.

In Luke 15:20, the father of the prodigal son had not heard an apology when he saw his son returning and, "while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him." This father was waiting and looking for his son. Notice fathers, it is OK with God if you hug your sons. You need their hugs and they need yours. I love the hugs that I get from Dan. Most fathers love; but, that is not enough. If we love, we must *show our love*. Only then can our children be supported and secure. It is a nasty trick to show love until age seven then suddenly take it away.

Let me tell you the secret sadness of so many children. In the confidentiality of therapy the thing that I have heard the most is, "**I wish my father had told me that he loved me, just once.**" "I know that he must have loved me, but why didn't he tell me?" More depends on this one thing than you can ever know. How can we be a good model of the word *father*, if we do not tell and show our children that we love them?

*Third*, give your child what they want the most. What is that? **It is you; give them you.** Harry Chapin wrote a song about a father who was so busy *providing for* his son that he had no time *for* his son. After some years, the son finally gave up trying to get his father to give him time. Then the father retired and wanted to spend

some time with his boy. By then, the son had become his father all over again. The chorus goes, "The cat and the cradle and the silver spoon, little boy blue and the man in the moon. When ya comin home son? I don't know when, but we'll get together then. We'll have a good time then."

Don't be fooled into thinking that you will not make it in business if you give time to your children. Research shows that "Fathers who invest time and effort in their children's lives are just as successful as men who are less involved."<sup>2</sup> When you're tempted to think that you don't have time for your children because of your business, remember this question: **Who taught Jesus how to be a carpenter?**

*Fourth*, a father must encourage and show approval. I have picked this point to close this sermon. I expect, the wreck of many lives is never knowing that your father loves you or never knowing that your father admires you; never getting his approval. That is why I have said, a father must *show love*, not just *love*. Children are not mind readers. Most fathers love very deeply; who ever told them that they could not show their love? Our heavenly father does not hesitate to show his love.

Of all the people your child wants to please, Dad, you're number one. They will never tell you that; they may even act like they don't care what you think; but, they will work like a tornado to get you to notice. It is a rule that fathers brag about their children to everyone but their children. Maybe it is awkward for fathers and life goes by so fast that they never get the courage to do what they want to do down deep in their heart. I think this is a large part of what Ephesians 6:4 means when it says, "fathers do not provoke your children to anger." Don't think you will toughen and strengthen them by never giving them your approval –instead, cheer them on.

After the death of my mother, my Dad had to pick up the job of sending out cards. He did extremely well at it and we were all very proud of him. I want to read you a birthday card he sent me.

"You've grown to be the kind of man a parent's bound to love,  
The kind it's only natural to respect and be proud of...  
It's more than your accomplishments, Or special things you've done  
- It's what you are that makes you such a very special son!"

**If you're going to be a father, you had better figure out how you're going to say that to your child.**

I often think back to that "life changing experience" when I saw that father hug his distressed daughter; then I remember, it was probably the daughter who hugged the father first. Whichever way it was, it worked. Maybe, the best way to help fathers become better fathers, would be to give them a hug; you could "jump start" them.

Fatherhood is too important to neglect. When I look at Scripture and then I look at where we are, I keep thinking, "Fatherhood needs an injection of a 40% solution of motherhood." Dad, don't let yourself get too old before you discover that! **Watch the Robins and you will see a lots of good Dads.** Dads should be doing all the Mom stuff; but, in a "male sort of way" –with a "male flavor." Happy Father's Day –and, Thank You!

<sup>1</sup> Satir, V. (1983). *Conjoint Family Therapy, Third Edition*. Science & Behavior Books, Inc.: Palo Alto. pp. 5,6.

<sup>2</sup> Roberts, M. (1989). "The Benefits of Fatherhood." *Psychology Today*. March, p. 76.