

DAD IS IN THE HOUSE, Pt 1
LEARNING TO TRUST
Overcoming the Fears of Fatherhood
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*Psalm 68:5 Father to the fatherless, defender of widows—
this is God, whose dwelling is holy.*

*⁶ God places the lonely in families;
he sets the prisoners free and gives them joy.*

God describes Himself as the “Father to the fatherless” and the builder of families. This begins to express the significance of fatherhood and the kind of familial care that reflects God’s love, which He depicts as setting “prisoners free and [giving] them joy”.

This is a floodlight of guidance from above for all men. And we desperately need to heed it.

State of the Family

Fatherhood is in crisis in America:

- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes. (Coalition of Parental Support)
- 85% of all youths sitting in prisons grew up in a fatherless home. (Fulton County Georgia jail populations & Texas Dept. of Corrections, 1992)
- 85% of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes. (Center for Disease Control)
- 80% of rapists motivated with displaced anger come from fatherless homes. (Criminal Justice and Behavior, Vol. 14, p. 403-26)
- 75% of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes. (Coalition of Parental Support)
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes. (National Principals Association Report on the State of High Schools)
- 70% of juveniles in state operated institutions come from fatherless homes. (U.S. Dept. of Justice, Special Report Sept., 1988)
- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes. (U.S. D.H.H.S., Bureau of the Census)

Translated, this means that children from a fatherless home are:

- 32 times more likely to run away
- 20 times more likely to have behavioral disorders
- 20 times more likely to end up in prison
- 14 times more likely to commit rape
- 10 times more likely to abuse chemical substances
- 9 times more likely to drop out of school
- 9 times more likely to end up in a state operated institution
- 5 times more likely to commit suicide

No Dad in the House

The very sad fact is that not all “fatherless” homes actually lack a man in the house (which, if we could measure it, would dramatically increase these statistics). In many more cases, there is a man in the house, but there is no *dad* in the house. For various reasons, some men abdicate or simply fail at their role as father to the children in their home.

Disregarding their children’s potential, both for success and devastation, some simply prefer to care for themselves more.

Others, who wish they could do better, still choose to pour themselves (or escape) into work or hobbies, instead of raising children to healthy adulthood.

In some cases, it is surely because they themselves have had poor role models, or no (or poor) preparatory training for their role.

In other cases, it appears that some, who believe in evolution of the species, must imagine that parenthood is genetically transmitted. Even if true, that would be a painfully slow process — and I underscore “painfully” — over thousands or millions of years of gradual development and tremendous loss.

Today, however, I am speaking to men who are seeking to improve their fathering skills. Yet, the desire to achieve is seldom equal to the ability to do so. We are fraught with shame, insecurities, and fears. What can be done to overcome them?

As always, if we are willing to take a sincere look at the state of our hearts and bring the results to God in prayer, He will help us to change (and, much more rapidly than the evolutionary process).

Overcoming Shame

Shame causes dads to behave awkwardly, and often detrimentally. A mind clouded by shame cannot reason clearly about instruction or discipline.

How does a father develop shame relative to his children? Perhaps his child is born with an abnormal condition.

John 9:1 As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. ² “Rabbi,” his disciples asked him, “why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?” ³ “It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,” Jesus answered. “This happened so the power of God could be seen in him.

Whether spoken or unspoken, such questions of shame haunt many dads, who feel, at some level, that they may be responsible for their child’s condition or defect. However, listen to what God told Moses:

Exodus 4:11 Then the Lord asked Moses, “Who makes a person’s mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the Lord?”

*Proverbs 20:12 Ears to hear and eyes to see—
both are gifts from the Lord.*

Clearly, this is a matter outside of human engineering and reserved to God's control. He may choose to give or to take away — still, blessed be the name of the Lord. You are not to blame. Cast off that shame and seek the glorious power of God. He has a plan for your child's life, and for you.

Then, there is the shame that arises from elements of our past lifestyle. Could it, genetically or emotionally, affect our children? There may, indeed, be undesirable consequences connected to our past behaviors, but the grace of God is greater!

Ezekiel 18:20 The child will not be punished for the parent's sins, and the parent will not be punished for the child's sins.

God will not punish you for your past by heaping difficulty on your kids. (He may punish you by giving you kids like you were... just kidding!)

The other side of this promise is equally freeing. Many dads fear the results of their children's behaviors will come back to haunt the parents in the forms of embarrassment, humiliation, or a soiled reputation. It may be true, but God wants you to recognize that it will not be the end of the world — only of your flimsy pride. There is something far greater and more substantial to be gained by not retreating from your children, but by embracing them, with all of their weaknesses and failings, the same way that God, in His grace, has embraced you.

*Psalms 27:10 Even if my father and mother abandon me,
the LORD will hold me close.*

Overcoming Insecurity

Parental insecurity is the cause of all manner of woe and hurt feelings. It leads some dads to abdicate their role as head of the home.

*Proverbs 3:11 My child, don't reject the LORD's discipline,
and don't be upset when he corrects you.
12 For the LORD corrects those he loves,
just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.*

Disciplinary correction is part of a dad's God-given toolkit. But it is one of the more challenging and sensitive areas of fathering. If dad is insecure about who he is and what he is called to do for his family, he may have difficulty applying positive correction.

Some dads are afraid that their kids will stop liking them if they act as disciplinarian. They want their kids to be their friends.

First, friendship with and from your kids is natural if you actively and consistently love them. Properly applying parental discipline won't interfere with friendship.

On the other hand, if you're looking for a buddy, you should probably look for someone more your own age! Some dads imagine that their kids (especially sons) can fill the gap created by their poor social skills.

Being a close friend to your child is actually just fine, as long as it doesn't interfere with parental discipline when it is called for. However, it is natural and to be expected, that at some points dads will have to step into the role of parent and disciplinarian, and you may find opposition from your child.

That is, they may accuse you of only pretending to be their friend or threaten to cease being yours. You cannot back down then!

Their friendship and loving behavior will return when discipline has had its effect, with greater respect for you. The respect you should be looking for is not the kind that fears your greater size, weight, or strength, but the kind that recognizes your greater wisdom. The kind that acknowledges, "You were right."

Proverbs 4:4 **My father taught me,**
 "Take my words to heart.
 Follow my commands, and you will live.
⁵ *Get wisdom; develop good judgment.*
 Don't forget my words or turn away from them.

A father's greatest asset in the challenge of child-rearing is his word. It may also be his greatest liability. Your kids don't need lectures very often, since childhood minds can seldom concentrate sufficiently to make a lecture useful. But they do need heartfelt words of wisdom and understanding. The average American dad speaks with his child less than 30 seconds per day! How much wisdom could you possibly pack into 30 seconds?

Unfortunately, most dads' language skills are developed at their job, and that is not the kind of communication kids need. My suggestion? Read the Book of Proverbs, and read it often. Much of it was written by a godly father for his children to read. Read it in a modern translation and it will give you a good "leg up" and communicating godly wisdom to your kids in bite-sized pieces.

Another vital part of good communication is listening. As your kids grow older, you must do less talking and more listening. This is the only way to learn how your child thinks and reasons and expresses his or her ideas. Thus, you can learn, not only their language, but also their point of view. As a child grows, he must develop his own point of view. He, quite naturally, takes on yours when he is young, but as he gets older he will (must) experiment with some others. This can be unnerving to dads, but is necessary for good health and self-discovery. Just here, the wisdom of God assures us:

Proverbs 22:6 **Direct your children onto the right path,**
and when they are older, they will not leave it.

Overcoming Fear

To experience the unfailing love of the Lord is a wonderful aspect of life. Dads can do a great deal to prepare their children for that knowledge and experience.

Psalms 27:10 **Even if my father and mother abandon me,**
 the LORD will hold me close.

Psalms 103:13 **The LORD is like a father to his children,**
 tender and compassionate to those who fear him.
¹⁴ *For he knows how weak we are;*
 he remembers we are only dust.

Compassion is another valuable tool of godly dads. But you cannot be compassionate if you are bound by fear.

Some dads are afraid of their role and its impact on the future of their children. Some are afraid of their children, because they haven't taken the time or energy to understand them. Some are afraid of messing up or of failure.

Others are afraid of things outside of the home (job security, ability to provide), but they bring the fear home with them and it affects their relationships.

You cannot be compassionate if you are afraid. Instead, you'll be harsh, agitated, irritable, nagging, or yelling.

Luke 6:36 *You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate. (see Luke 15:11-24)*

How does a godly father treat his children? Paul has described the essence of it:

1 Thessalonians 2:11 *And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children.* ¹² *We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy.*

"Pleading" for good behavior is generally more effective than commanding.

"Encouraging" to try, to risk, to try again, to succeed, is generally more effective than scolding.

"Urging" your children to live worthy (worthwhile) lives is generally more effective than demanding certain levels of function (like grades or skills).

Faith is the Answer

Ultimately, a dad's faith is the best answer for all the challenges and dilemmas and surprises of fathering. Yet, dads don't have to have perfect faith (and none do) to accomplish much. One man, whose son was tormented by seizures and other demonic harassment, brought his son to Jesus, saying, "If you can do anything, please help him."

Jesus replied with surprise, "If *I* can do anything? If *you* can believe, all things are possible."

Mark 9:24 *The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"*

That's a good prayer for all dads! None of us were chosen for this job because of our excellence. It has often seemed to me that I was chosen for my ignorance! In every dad's case, he is traveling a path that he has never trod before. Nor has anyone else walked exactly where he does. Every dad and every child and every circumstance is unique. Put the three together and you have an absolutely unique chord in a song that has never been played before!

Know yourself and your limitations and admit your need. Many limitations can be overcome. Many limits can be stretched. But only if you insist on doing so and appeal for help. Friends and elders and pastors can help (and good books), but no one knows your situation and can help as much as God.

Don't be reluctant, and don't be embarrassed to call out to Him. And don't wait until you are absolutely desperate (too many good opportunities will have passed by then). Make Him your Chief Counselor. Learn fathering from the Best.

Faith must also be communicated (it's not a one-way street). You must trust the Lord, and you must build that trust into your children's lives. You cannot give your children a faith you yourself do not

practice. No amount of Sunday School or Scripture memorization on their parts can make up for a lack of practical faith on your part.

If you have lived your faith (with all your mistakes and restarts) in the open before them, they will know that you are real and that your faith is real.

Then, send them out to put their trust in God, too. Give them a sense of purpose and an intentional blessing.

John 20:21 As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.

Follow Jesus' lead and pass it on. Entrust to them what is yours, not merely materially, but especially spiritually.

Luke 10:22 "My Father has entrusted everything to me.

John 3:35 The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands.

They will never really know what they are capable of until you trust them to take over where you let go. And you will never really know the joy of fatherhood until you see them do so.

Instructive correction and compassionate trust are your two greatest instruments for grooming your kids into healthy, successful adults and overcoming your fears of fatherhood.