

WHAT IS A DAD TO DO?

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I once had a friend who lived in the next block, whose home was filled with all manner of antiques — carpets, tables, chairs, statues, plates, glasses, vases, clocks — everywhere you looked. What was especially unusual was that every single piece had a price sticker attached to it. Lift up an ashtray or a table lamp and there was a price tag attached! If you liked the pillow you were leaning on, you could take it home with you! Or, if your son accidentally dropped a small statue of a dog, you could take that home, too... for a price.

In contrast, I had another friend who owned just a handful of antiques — mostly glasses and tea cups and a single vase. These things were locked in a lighted cabinet behind glass doors in a conspicuous location in the living room — highlighted for all to see and appreciate, and protected from careless hands.

Cherish Your Wife

This illustrates a dad's first responsibility: to cherish his wife. Not only because she is the primary love in his life, but, as it has been said, dads, if you want to really love your own children, really love their mother.

After all, it demonstrates a harmony that lends security to young and tender hearts. If love, affection, and forgiveness are visible in your home, especially since your children know their parents inconsistencies, it promotes a healthy confidence that their own inconsistencies will be greeted with similar mercy and kindness.

When such harmony is *not* present, kids of all ages are deeply affected by its absence, often feeling responsible in some way for creating or contributing to the breach.

In a passage in Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, in which he emphasizes a Christian husband's responsibility to love his wife "as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her," this concept of cherishing is applied:

Ephesians 5:28 *In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself.²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.*

Paul suggests that we understand what cherishing is at a very personal and intuitive level. It's how we take care of our own bodies.

Nevertheless, I'll offer this definition: to cling fondly to and treat with affection and tenderness, to regard as precious treasure.

Is there any clearer example of this tender affection than when an infant lies in its mother's arms?

1 Thessalonians 2:7 *But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.*

Eyes locked in adoration and wonder, cooing sounds followed by giggles and laughter, touching, tickling and gently stroking. I watch in wonder and admiration at how often my daughter holds her daughter or son close and says, “I just love you so much,” punctuated by a kiss.

The Amplified Bible offers a wonderful example of cherishing by the way that God regards His children of faith, those whom He “*accepts and welcomes to His heart and cherishes*” (AMP Hebrews 12:6). Cherishing is about acceptance to the nth degree: it is about “welcoming to [your] heart.”

Men, I’m sure you felt these ways about your wife in the early part of your relationship. Is this how you still feel toward her?

Undoubtedly, some of you have lost that sense of attachment and fondness. That’s actually quite natural. Trying to win her affection turns to expecting her affection with little further effort at all. Then there are the inescapable bumps in the relational road, where clashes of preference and expectation occur. If you have left your primary commitment to promote and protect the wonder and excitement of your relationship, feelings will begin to fade away.

Feelings are so fickle! Her today and gone tomorrow. But the great thing is that they can be back again the next day, if you decide to let the Lord help you to do something about it.

Think about how to treasure her again, how to protect her and put her on loving display.

It’s the most important thing you can do — for you, for her, and for your kids.

Champion Your Children

Psalm 103:13 The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him.

In these last days before the return of Jesus Christ, one of the key activities of the Holy Spirit through the Church is to fulfill what Malachi prophesied concerning the Messiah’s forerunner:

Malachi 4:6 His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers.

Unenlightened Jews still think he referred to Elijah’s return from the dead. Jesus shed light on the matter when He told His disciples that John the Baptist filled that role at His first appearing. The whole Church will serve in this same capacity before His second coming.

The second major responsibility of a Christian dad is to champion his kids. Three basic definitions arise: to support (side with), to advocate (promote, stand up for), to defend (fight for). Ultimately, that means to become their militant supporter.

Paul warns us first against the all-too-common negative behaviors that dads fall into:

Colossians 3:21 Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.

On the positive side, discipline is urged.

Hebrews 12:7 As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father?

However, discipline can so easily be (and often is) perverted — as in the previous warnings, when the focus is turned to a dad's self-expression of personal emotions (like fear and anger), instead of keeping the focus on the child's well-being through limited, attention-getting punishment followed by positive, thoughtful training.

Jeremiah 47:3 Terrified fathers run madly, without a backward glance at their helpless children.

Fear- and anger-based discipline is destructive in its effect, robbing children of the security of parental care. On the other hand, discipline which is positively applied is life-enhancing, building a strong foundation of healthy principles for daily living.

Militant Supporter

Championing your kids means becoming their coach and cheerleader. Be on *their* side, not just your own.

1 Thessalonians 2:11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,¹² encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

The Old Testament wisdom that is often referred to in matters of child-raising is this:

Proverbs 22:6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

This is usually presented as license to brainwash your children with your preferences and impose your behaviors on them, so they will become little clones of you.

[History teacher who asked, How many of you are Republicans? How many are Democrats? One girl: Are your parents also Republicans? If they were morons, then what would you be? I suppose a Democrat.] Now, God is neither Democrat nor Republican, and it matters not a whit to me how you are registered. The point of the illustration is that preferences may be imposed as if they were God's truth... and that stifles child development.

The proverb actually teaches that we are to train up *each* of our children *according to their own way*. That means we must make the effort to recognize and cultivate the *unique* personality traits and spiritual gifts of each child. One size does not fit all! If you help your child to *accept* his or her own personality traits (because *you* accept them and welcome them into your heart) and *discover* his or her unique gifts and abilities (this takes time and attention to detail), then they will become clear about who they are and grounded for life.

Loyal Defender

I found three key verses using the term that describes this aspect of fatherhood. The first is from the narrative about Jesus' itinerant lifestyle, a reference to the many women who supported Him in His travels:

Luke 8:3 ...and many others who were contributing their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.

This was primarily material support. Dads, do your kids feel materially supported by you? If you're usually playing the "we can't afford it" card, they probably don't. They need a healthy dose of spontaneous extravagance (what that means will vary according to your financial position, but everyone can be occasionally extravagant at your own level), best applied at your instigation, *before* they ask for it.

AMP Romans 11:18 *If you do boast and feel superior, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root [that supports] you.*

Since you, dad, are the "root" from which your children have sprung, it is clearly your responsibility to provide for them; they do not exist to support you! They are not your little slaves. Don't send them to do the nasty jobs; instead, take them with you to show them how to do the nasty jobs with love and dignity. If you support them in the tough things, they will learn how to support others when the going is rough.

NJB 2 Corinthians 1:4 *He supports us in every hardship, so that we are able to come to the support of others, in every hardship of theirs because of the encouragement that we ourselves receive from God.*

NJB Acts 20:35 *By every means I have shown you that we must exert ourselves in this way to support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, who himself said, "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."*

Your children qualify as "the weak." Give yourself to them.

Fervent Advocate

The third key aspect of Christian parental support is advocacy.

AMP 2 Timothy 4:16 *At my first trial no one acted in my defense [as my advocate] or took my part or [even] stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them!*

Defending your kids against outside attacks is usually the lesser side of this story. Actually, the first element of defense is to defend them against yourself — your selfishness, your stubbornness, your laziness, etc. Never punish your child without adequate, intentional follow-up:

1 Peter 5:10 *In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.*

God always follows-up any necessary suffering in our lives with restoration, support, and strengthening that provides surer footing for the future. Dads, you can also practice this with your kids!

Jesus is our *advocate* in Heaven whenever we sin; the Holy Spirit is our *Advocate* from Heaven here on earth (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 1 John 2:1). We are fully represented with respect to our repeated need for forgiveness and grace. Dads, let's be the same way for our kids. Let's model the grace of Jesus Christ for them, and teach them how to rely on the Holy Spirit from day to day.

Then every day can become a great Father's Day!