

HOW TO BE A WONDERFUL DAD AND FATHER

On my first Father's Day as I was serving on staff as a new pastor in California, someone passed out to all of us a Father's Day tract. I read it, thought about it, and finally taped it into the front cover of my Bible until it wore out. Now I have it typed and pasted there. Why? Because it is never too late to start doing what is right! And often listening to someone explain what they would do differently if they could helps us to start the same pathway ourselves. I listen carefully and try to learn from those ahead of me in their earthly pilgrimages. Do you know what? The changes they often share are so easy to implement even today. No matter where you are in the parenting process.

FATHERS HAVE A BIG CHALLENGE

So here it is, let me read it to you:

"My family's all grown, and the kids are all gone. But, if I had to do it all over again, this is what I'd do:

I would **love my wife** more in front of my children.

I would **laugh with my children** more — at our mistakes and our joys.

I would **listen more**, even to the littlest child.

I would **be more honest** about my own weaknesses, never pretending perfection.

I would **pray differently** for my family — instead of focusing on them, I'd focus on me.

I would **do more things** together with my children.

I would **encourage them more** and bestow more praise.

I would **pay more attention** to little things, like deeds and words of thoughtfulness.

And then, finally, if I had to do it all over again, I would **share God more intimately** with my family; every ordinary thing that happened in every ordinary day I would use to direct them to God."¹

This explains why Charlie Shedd made one of his original promises to his tiny son, Peter:

I hope that I will be able to make knowing God natural to you. It is natural. In fact, I think this relationship with God is the only thing that is one hundred percent natural. We will pray together until it is easy for you to put your arms on the windowsill of heaven and look into the face of God. Before I put you back in your crib, I want to tell you something Philip said.

We had been out in the country for a ride. It was evening and we ran out of gas. We were walking along after we had been to the farmhouse, and I was carrying a can of gas. Philip was only four. He was playing along, throwing rocks at the telephone poles, picking flowers, and then, all of a sudden it got dark. Sometimes night comes all at once in the

¹ From the Focus on the Family "Father's Day" tract.
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country. Philip came over, put his little hand in mine and said, "Take my hand, Daddy. I might get lost."

Peter, there is a hand reaching to you from the heart of the universe. If you will lay your hand in the hand of God and walk with Him, you will never ever get lost.²

Our text this morning is God's Word about a father He the Lord thought was WONDERFUL, not perfect, just wonderful!

Genesis 18:19 "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him." (NKJV)

SO WHAT ARE WE MISSING IN THE 90'S?

In a study conducted several years ago, sociologists Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, of Harvard University, identified several crucial factors in the development of juvenile delinquents. They created a test that can, with about 90 percent accuracy, predict future delinquency of children five to six-years-old. They listed four necessary factors in preventing juvenile delinquency:

- The father's discipline must be firm, fair, and consistent.
- The mother must know where her children are and what they are doing at all times, and be with them as much as possible.
- The children need to see affection demonstrated between their parents, and from their parents to them.
- The family must spend time together as a unit.

In a similar report, but from a Christian perspective, Dr. Paul D. Meier, a Christian psychiatrist, wrote that the key to right parent-child relationships could be summed up in five things:

1. Parents' love for each other and for the children;
2. Discipline;
3. Consistency;
4. A good parental example; and
5. A man at the head of the home.

Is that true? Listen to the world, they have taken note of it. Marion Levy in her societal critique has written,

"for the first time in the history of humankind the overwhelming majority of little boys and little girls continued under the direct domination and supervision of ladies until they reached maturity. This has never happened before in history. Crusades, wars, migrations, pestilence - nothing for a people as a whole ever before took so large a percentage of young adult and older adult males out of the family context for so much of the waking time of the children. Most of us have not even noticed the change, nor do we have any idea of its radicality."³

WONDERFUL DADS:

1. KNOW their job is important but their home is essential

² Letters to Phillip.

³ Piper, Where's Dad, p. 9.

2. EXPRESS deep love for their wives but always save some for their children
3. PAY ATTENTION and respond to their children but even more to God. How bad is it? U.S. News and World Report states these facts: 1 in 4 children born have no father to welcome them at birth. Only 40% of children grow up in 2 parent families. A million children each year go through divorce, 9 out of 10 will stay with their mothers. And when he is present a normal dad gives his children only 3 minutes of time to them with his undivided attention!

Often bouquets are thrown to moms on Mother's Day and dads get a shot between the eyes on Fathers Day. Amazingly every one of the 27 references to fathers in Proverbs is POSITIVE! And, when we get to the New Testament the pattern continues. Everything we see him do is right on.

- ✓ If you are a dad, follow his lead.
- ✓ If you want to be a dad, listen up and learn.
- ✓ If your children are grown, listen and share. Let's all commit to be fathers of the Word !

What are four landmarks of a wonderful father? What marks out the region we must guard? Let me briefly trace them:

1ST WONDERFUL FATHERS MUST BE FAIR Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (NIV). How are we as dads unfair at times? The great reformed bible teacher William Hendriksen⁴ suggests at least six ways fathers embitter their children:

1. **Beware of Overprotection.** Let the boys be boys, not little girls. They need to run, climb, get scraped and explore or they will not develop into the leader and protector they must become.
2. **Beware of Favoritism.** Look at Esau and Jacob's mom Rebecca, then Jacob and his doting on Joseph. It embittered those around.
3. **Beware of Discouragement.** If we always say they will never amount to anything, they might believe us. If we say you are a pain, they will feel it.
4. **Beware of destroying Individuality.** God has made and gifted each of his children uniquely, as spiritual snowflakes. Don't make clones of yourself, let God make them as He plans.
5. **Beware of Neglect.** Spend time with them. Instead of hustling off the kids to bed, put the work or TV to bed early and spend special and long times with those fast passing childhood days.
6. **Beware of Bitter Words and outright physical Cruelty.** Don't abuse them verbally or physically. That means do not correct them in anger. James 1:20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (NKJV)

2ND WONDERFUL FATHERS MUST BE TENDER. Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up [this word means⁵ "to nourish, to provide for with tender care"] in the training and admonition of the Lord. (NKJV). Here are a few practical application of this idea:

1. Listen to them before you spank them⁶, so they know their feeling are important.
2. Apologize to them when you have been wrong, harsh, angry or negligent.
3. Accept the concerns, constructive criticism and ideas your wife offers. And, put them in practice.

⁴ NTC, Ephesians, p. 261.

⁵ Reinecker, p.540.

⁶ Farrar, p. 211.

4. Be a hugger, holder, encourager and friend. And, spread it onto mom to, not just the children.
5. Remember, neglect is the DANGER SIGN OF A BAD DAD

ELI NEGLECTED SELF-RESTRAINT AND GOD JUDGED HIM. Personal discipline is vital to God.
Eli lacked self-restraint and God judges him.

"When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had led Israel forty years" (1 Samuel 4:18).

ELI NEGLECTED DISCIPLINING OF HIS CHILDREN. Disciplining our children is vital to God. God said that Eli participated in his sons' sins because he did not rebuke them.

"Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?" (1 Samuel 2:29).

ELI NEGLECTED CONFRONTING SIN IN HIS HOME. Confronting sin in our home is vital to God. God rebukes Eli because he continued to resist confronting sin in his home.

"For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them" (1 Samuel 3:13).

How can we summarize the danger signs of a bad dad? Like Eli, this involves:

- Preoccupation with an occupation to the exclusion of family needs.
- Refusal to face the severity of his children's actions.
- Failure to respond quickly and thoroughly to the warnings of others.
- Rationalizing the wrong, thereby becoming part of the problem.

3RD WONDERFUL FATHERS MUST BE FIRM. Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training [this word is neat⁷, it "may be described as training by means of rules and regulations, rewards, and when necessary, punishments. It refers primarily to what is done to the child."] and admonition [by contrast this word means "training by means of the spoken word, whether that be teaching, warning, or encouragement. It refers primarily to what is said to the child."] of the Lord. (NKJV)

Years back when members of Britain's Royal Family toured the US they were asked to share the most amazing thing they had observed in America. Without a moment of hesitation the reporter was told, "The Way the parents obey their children."⁸

Listen to Ken Taylor⁹ whose Living Bible paraphrase has touched so many lives:

- *A Father's task is many sided, but the most important part of his work is to fit himself and his family into God's plan of family authority. Children are to be encouraged by the fathers pat on the back. And, helped to better things when necessary by the application of the hand or stick to the seat of learning. of course there are other methods of discipline besides spanking, but*

⁷ Hendriksen, p. 62.

⁸ Farrar, p.216.

⁹ Quotable Quotations, Victor, 1985.

whatever is called for must be used. To refuse to discipline a child is to refuse the clear command of God. A child who does not learn to obey both parents will find it much harder to learn to obey God."

- God said if your home is not in order you may not lead in the church 1 Timothy 3:4-5 one who rules his own house well, having [his] children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); (NKJV)

ABRAHAM COMMANDED the direction of his family!

"For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him" (Genesis 18:19, NKJV).

What was it God admired about this man of faith? Abraham commanded his family to look beyond the passing fancies of this world system, beyond the materialism of the day (in Ur of the Chaldees). That meant for him to forsake gods of this world system (e.g., sun god, moon god). And it meant to obey the true and living and only God! God chose him to "command his family." How did he do that? Look at Hebrews 11:8-10.

- IF GOD SAID "GO" — HE WENT!

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:8-10).

- IF GOD SAID "LEAVE IT ALL" (Materialism) — HE DROPPED IT!

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- IF GOD SAID "WORSHIP ONLY ME" — HE DID!

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11:8-10).

4TH WONDERFUL FATHERS MUST BE CHRISTLIKE. Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (NKJV). We as dads need to lead the way in how to live among this sinful and fallen race in a godly way. Chuck Swindoll notes some temptations we as dads must by God's grace resist. These are great, you need to write them down:

0. **BEWARE OF THE DANGER OF MATERIAL POSSESSIONS.** We must provide for our family or as 1 Timothy 5:8 says "if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (NKJV) However the temptation is TO SUBSTITUTE WHAT YOU PURCHASE FOR YOUR FAMILY FOR YOUR PRESENCE WITH YOUR FAMILY. In other words, Toys instead of Time. That means nights at the office, endless travel, weekends working...no gift can replace your presence. Ask them what they remember about growing up. It won't be the label on their clothing. It will be father son or daughter breakfasts, trips to the zoo, park or games. It will be the nights you waited up for them, the games you cheered them and the hours you coached them in the back yard or workshop. Give them time with you. That's what they want and need.
0. **BEWARE OF THE DANGER OF EMOTIONAL STARVATION.** We are daily tempted to SAVE OUR BEST FOR THE WORKPLACE AND GIVE OUR FAMILIES THE LEFTOVERS. Are you like a jet at the airport? You exercise, refuel and taxi out of the hangar to fly to work full of energy and ideas all day, only to run low on fuel as you land and taxi into your recliner to shut down for the day? Where are you investing your life? In things that won't matter in a hundred years? Be careful.
0. **BEWARE OF THE DANGER OF MISGUIDED COMMUNICATION.** We often fall into the trap as dads of starting to DELIVER LECTURES RATHER THAN EARNING THE RIGHT TO BE RESPECTED THROUGH LISTENING AND LEARNING. Remember James 1:19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; (NKJV)
1. **BEWARE OF THE DANGER OF PERFECTIONISM.** This is such a subtle temptation to some of us dads. We have fallen into the wrong pattern of DESIRING TO BE PERFECT AND DEMANDING THE SAME FROM THE REST OF OUR FAMILY. It is when nothing is ever good enough. Tom Eisenman¹⁰ describes some of the tendencies of men who are perfectionists:
 - o Perfectionists tend to think in **dichotomous categories**. Everything is either great or bad, perfect or worthless.
 - o Perfectionists also engage in **minimizing or maximizing**. Failures are maximized and successes are minimized. The small thing that went wrong destroys or at least overshadows everything else.
 - o Perfectionists set **unreasonable goals** for themselves and others.
 - o Perfectionists judge their personal **worth by their performance**, and others by the same standard.
 - o We must realize that God is a God of the second chance. We are sinners. All of us fail Him and others and we must get right with Him and them, and go on. Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all [points] tempted as [we are, yet] without sin. (NKJV)

¹⁰ Temptations Men Face, IVP, 1990, pp. 168-70.

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0. **BEWARE OF THE DANGER OF UNDISCIPLINED DESIRES.** This is the fifth area of living in this wicked world we must guard. This is the temptation to SEEK INTIMATE SATISFACTION OUTSIDE THE BONDS OF MONOGAMY. Simply it means to seek and find sensual satisfaction in reading, seeking, listening, imagining or even experiencing any woman other than your wife. James 1:13-15 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (NKJV).
- Don't give in, even for a fleeting peek, a lustful glance, a quick peek in the magazine, a moment on the movie channel, or a meeting with a woman. Flee, say no and don't look back.
 - It often helps to take reminders of your family with you to work. look at their smiling faces in pictures on business trips, put them around your office or work area, talk about your wife as your sweetheart and best friend to your coworkers, especially if they are women.
 - And most of all remember the lives of your family rest in your care.
0. **BEWARE OF THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING SPIRITUAL NURTURING.** The final area we are tempted in is TO UNDER-ESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTIVATING YOUR FAMILY'S SPIRITUAL APPETITE. You must lead the way to the Word, church, prayer meeting, verse memorization. the children should see dad praying, reading, witnessing, serving in the Lord's work, helping the helpless, sacrificing resources to invest in eternity, resisting worldliness and pride. All those area are caught more than taught.

The key to Joseph's parenting was that he led his family to worship God. Nothing spectacular, nothing superhuman, just regular and consistent. But the results were extraordinary. A modern illustration of this type of consistency can be found in the upbringing of John Paton¹¹.

John Paton was a Scottish missionary to the New Hebrides, islands that are today called Vanuatu, located one thousand miles north of New Zealand and four hundred miles west of Fiji. Paton arrived November 4, 1858, on the island of Tanna at the age of thirty-four, with his wife, Mary Ann. A son was born February 12, 1859. "Our island exile filled with joy," Paton wrote in his autobiography¹² (page 79), but "the greatest of sorrows was treading hard upon the heels of that joy!" First came the fever, then diarrhea, then pneumonia and delirium. On March 3 Mary died. "To crown my sorrows, and complete my loneliness, the dear baby boy, whom we had named after her father, Peter Robert Robson, was taken from me after one week's sickness on the 20th of March (page 79).

Paton buried both of them with his own hands and "with ceaseless prayers and tears...claimed that land for God." He confessed, "But for Jesus, and the fellowship He vouchsafed me there, I must have gone mad and died beside that lonely grave! (page 80).

What kind of father prepared John G. Paton for that kind of perseverance -- another fifty years of rugged, faithful missionary labor?

¹¹ Piper, A Godward Life, pp.284-286.

¹² John G. Paton, The Autobiography of John G. Paton (Edinburgh:Banner of Truth, 1965).

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Paton's father, James, was converted at seventeen and immediately convinced his mother and father that the family should have morning and evening prayer together. Paton writes about his father:

"And so began in his seventeenth year that blessed custom of Family Prayer, morning and evening which my father practiced probably without one single avoidable omission till he lay on his deathbed at seventy-seven years of age...None of us can remember that any day ever passed unhallowed thus; no hurry for market, no rush to business, no arrival of friends or guests, no trouble or sorrow, no joy or excitement, ever prevented at least our kneeling around the family altar, while the High Priest led our prayers to God, and offered himself and his children there. (page 14)"

The place of the Lord's Day was just as crucial in shaping the children in their relation to God and the joy of his fellowship. Paton writes:

"Our place of worship was the Reformed Presbyterian Church at Dumfries...four miles from our Torthorwald home; but the tradition is that during all these forty years my father was only three times prevented from attending the worship of God...Each of us, from very early days considered it no penalty, but a great joy, to go with our father to the church; the four miles were a treat to our young spirits, the company by the way was a fresh incitement... A few other pious men and women, of the best Evangelical type, went from the same parish...and when these God-fearing peasants 'foregathered' on the way to or from the House of God, we youngsters had sometimes rare glimpses of what Christian talk may be and ought to be. They went to church, full of beautiful expectancy of spirit -- their souls were on the outlook for God, and they returned from church, ready and even anxious to exchange ideas as to what they had heard and received of the things of life." (pages 15-16)

"There were eleven of us brought up in a home like that; and never one of the eleven, boy or girl, man or woman, has been heard, or ever will be heard, saying that Sabbath was dull or wearisome for us. " (page 17)

Such was the father and the family that fit John G. Paton to suffer, to survive, and rejoice in the glorious work of the gospel among the cannibalistic tribes of the New Hebrides.

So today I ask you, and myself

- (1) Dad, Is your family altar established? Is there a place and a time for family focus on the Word and prayer that takes priority over less important things? Do you lead it when ever possible?
- (2) Dads, do you come to corporate worship here at our fellowship with a beautiful expectancy of spirit on the lookout for God?

A great secret of rearing children who endure for fifty years in the New Hebrides is to be a fair, firm, tender, disciplined, Bible-saturated, worshiping, Christlike, and joyful dad.