

UNIQUELY DAD

Mountain View Alliance Church,
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Welcome dads! I hope all you dads are really enjoying some attention from your children – finally! Obviously, I'm not able to be close to my four today, but I've been hearing from them alright....

And it's nice to know that this time it isn't a request to "Send Money". I hope you feel honoured by your children today; maybe you've been given a gift... Somewhere along the way I was reading about the difference between what it meant to be a father sometime ago and what it means today:

There was a time a Father's Day gift would be a hand tool.
Today, he'll get a some kind of digital gadget.

There was a time that fathers shook their children gently and whispered, "Wake up, it's time for school." Today, kids shake their fathers violently at 4 a.m., shouting: "Wake up, it's time for hockey practice

At one time a happy meal was when Father shared funny stories around the table. Today, a happy meal is what Dad buys at McDonald's.

In earlier times a father waited for the doctor to tell him when the baby arrived. Today, a father must wear a smock, know how to breathe, and make he has a camera...

Earlier on fathers could count on children to join the family business. Today, fathers pray their kids will soon come home from college long enough to teach them how to work the computer and set the DVD Player.

At one time if a father got breakfast in bed, it was eggs and bacon and ham and potatoes. Today, it's Special K, soy milk, dry toast and a lecture on cholesterol.

There was a time a father came home from work to find his wife and children at the supper table. Today, a father comes home to a note: "Jimmy's at baseball, Cindy's at gymnastics, I'm at adult-Ed, Pizza's in the fridge."

Though I am many miles from home and away from our children, I am very conscious today of the special privilege there is in being called a father.

The very fact that we have such a day means that we attach some kind of special meaning to this role. And so it is evident that the line that defines the difference between men and women, mothers and dads, has not been completely obliterated.

There are several words that come to mind when I think of the distinctiveness of what it means to be a dad.

1. The first is **initiative and leadership**.

I know this doesn't always happen as it should but I think most dads would like to be known for taking the initiative in all kinds of things. If you're a dad like me you probably like to be appreciated for your ability to draft a certain plan, to take a certain direction, or to start a certain project. Men like to drive. I never knew a man who didn't like to get behind the wheel of something to make it go. I find, for example, that men don't ride well in cars together. In their hearts men are always fighting about who should drive!

It seems at least in the larger scale of things, men feel that they have been made to take charge, to take on responsibility, to drive the ship. In saying this, far be it from me to suggest that women don't have this ability. But it is particularly strong in men...

One thing you'll never hear a man say is:

Well, how 'bout that?... I'm lost! Looks like we'll have to stop and ask for directions

2. The second very strong distinctive of being a dad is the commitment to do whatever it takes to offer **protection and provision** for one's children.

It's probably true that there is nothing fiercer than a mother bear in defence of her cubs. But there are many more stories of men who have been willing to fight, to go to war, and to lay down their lives for their families and children. Being the defender of one's children and seeing that they are properly provided for is intuitively one of the strongest motivations in a man's heart. Men long to serve as firemen, rescue workers and policemen. Some women serve well in these capacities as well, but men identify deeply with these professions. And there is nothing more demoralizing for a man than to be unemployed so that he feels helpless to contribute to the well-being of his children. Someone has said:

Fathers are like a lighthouse - when there is fog his children can always depend on seeing the light

3. And the third feature of what it is to be uniquely dad is the strong desire that dads naturally have to **nurture and instruct** their children.

I grew up on a farm in west-central Manitoba. One of the things my dad loved to do was to build into the lives of me and my three brothers all about living on the farm. He took time to play with us and to build all kinds of toy farm machines and to show us a little about how to hunt, to trap, and to fish. (I remember him building us a small snow-plough or a miniature hay-stacker.) But he also loved to teach us about the animals and work on the farm. And beyond that he also liked to teach us about God by reading the Bible... Mom was a nurturer and a teacher in our lives too, of course, but there was no doubt that Dad took these things very seriously as well.

So there you have it: initiative and leadership, protection and providing, nurture and instruction.

These ideas that I share with you about dad, in my view, are not merely cultural adaptations to the particular time in which we live. I really believe that these features of fatherhood are intuitive and common to dads all over the world. Whether it's in India, Italy, or Indonesia, again and again you will find that dads have these things in common – they were made to take responsibility for their families. They are willing to lay down their lives for the sake of their children's protection and well-being. They want to ensure that their children are cared for and receive a good education.

And of course the question comes, where does this daring, this initiative, this commitment to jump in and take care of one's children in need, to teach them about the world and the ways of the Lord – where does this come from?

I don't think you have to look very far to conclude that this is so because dads have been made in the image of their Father in heaven. The very existence of Father's Day can't help but bring to mind the nature of the one who is called our *Heavenly Father*. And from the Bible we know about Him as the Creator and the Manager of all the different aspects of our universe. *In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth* – Genesis 1:1. Again and again, as I look around at the wonder of this great world, I can't help but be deeply moved by the fact that everything we see and more has come into existence by the hand of our Father in Heaven. What an amazing Father He is to begin all of these things and to manage them as He does, day after day, season after season, year after year, century after century, millennium after millennium.

But that's not all, the Bible also speaks of him as our Rock and Defender. Psalm 18:2 – *The Lord is my Rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in*

whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. But not only that, God is also the Provider for every living thing on earth. Yes there are deaths and disasters because of human failure, but God is amazing in how He takes care of the whole world.

Psalm 65:9 says, *You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it.*

But physical provision is only half of the story – God’s biggest provision for the world was the gift of His Son which we celebrate at Christmas. For in giving Him to us, we have been given every spiritual blessing imaginable – life itself.

And the thought of God as our provider in these ways leads us to this other feature of His Fatherhood – that of being one who comforts and nurtures and teaches us to know His ways.

Psalm 103:11 – 14 *For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.*

There are so many other passages we could look at, but these serve to show us these important features of what it means to be a dad. And it is these qualities that we see reflected in the story that the kids acted out today.

Here is a father who loves his sons because they belong to him and he is anxious to see that they are properly care for and provided for. So when the younger son comes to his father to ask for his inheritance while he is still alive, the father gives it to him. Maybe the son was planning on an early investment in something, and so the father agrees. It may have been brash of the son to ask for this, but the interesting thing is that the father doesn’t refuse him. Notice that he comes to father because father is ultimately in charge of the family estate. Obviously there was a mother involved, but nothing is said about her in this story. How many of us dads have had calls or requests from our kids for money? Maybe it hasn’t been the family estate, but nevertheless...

You can imagine the father wasn’t pleased with what his son was doing and no doubt he guessed what would happen to all the money. There is no doubt that

everyday he is thinking about his son and longing for his return. And when the day finally comes he sees him coming from a long way off and runs to meet him. Filled with compassion he throws his arms around him and kisses him as would be the custom in that tradition.

And when the son begins to apologise and express his deep remorse, the father doesn't wait for him to finish, he is so happy to see that his son is alive and has returned. He calls for the best robe in the house in the place of the son's rags, a ring for his finger showing wealth and affection, and a new pair of sandals for his likely bare feet, and the fattened calf for a great celebration.

What a dad! What a picture of what most dads would aspire to be to their needy, wandering, children! As we read this story of this dad, we can't help but feel he was a hero. And like this dad, no doubt, we long for wisdom on how to help our children achieve their highest potential for good. This is the frustrating thing about being a dad! So many times I too have cried for my kids as I see the sometimes foolish decisions they make. And I must say that I haven't always had the wisdom and patience and love that this father had. But there is a sense in which you never give up seeking the very best for your sons and your daughters, and are willing to do whatever it takes...

Well, of course, the reason Jesus told this story, is that he wanted to paint a picture of what his Father in heaven was really like. Jesus would want us to see that the father in this story is like God is in relation to *His* children. For though He made us and has given us so much, "*we all like sheep have gone astray;*" we've taken advantage of all His gifts and done our own thing with them, spending them, squandering them, yet always ending up rather dissatisfied.

But when we come to our senses and come home, repentant and truly sorry for our sin and rebellion, we find that God our Father is more than ready to forgive us and to lavish upon us the blessings of heaven. So in this most amazing story of *the prodigal*, we not only have an example of a really great dad. More than anything, we have a beautiful picture of how much the Father in heaven loves each of us, and how much He wants us to come home.

Maybe today as we look at these things you can see your own story of going your own way. Maybe today you can see that the Father in heaven is waiting for your return. Maybe this is the day you would want to come home to your father in heaven. Let's pray...