

Series Title: FATHER'S DAY SERMONS
Sermon Title: How Can I Be a Good Dad?
Place: Heritage Park Alliance Church
Date: June 20-21, 2009
Speaker: Dr. Garth Leno, Lead Pastor

This is Father's Day weekend! I am so glad you are here to enjoy part of the day with us as we celebrate dads and honour them for who they are in Christ.

Some time ago I came across a letter written to God by a young child. It goes like this:

Dear God,

Thanks for giving me such a good daddy. You knew just what I needed! And in case you need to make more daddies for other kids, I thought you might like to know what I like best about the one you sent me.

1. A good dad knows everything (like how to tie shoes and drive a car).
2. A good dad is really smart (he even knows where the wind goes after it blows through the trees).
3. He has a forgiving heart...
4. Good dads are loaded with patience, patience, patience! And,
5. A good dad tells me all about you and your son Jesus.

I'm convinced that every father listening to this message today wants to be a good dad. Deep down in his heart, every dad wants to be a good dad.

And the Bible can help us.

The Bible says a good dad is one who

1. GETS INVOLVED AND STAYS INVOLVED

Let's turn to Psalm 78 for a moment and look at a few verses there.

Psalm 78:5-7 NLT

For [the LORD] issued his laws to Jacob;
he gave his instructions to Israel.
He commanded our ancestors
to teach them to their children,
so the next generation might know them—
even the children not yet born—
and they in turn will teach their own children.
So each generation should set its hope anew
on God, not forgetting his glorious miracles
and obeying his commands.

That is God's plan – for every generation to learn his word and love him! So, Dads need to get involved and stay involved in teaching God's word to their kids so that their children and their children's children will experience a meaningful life with God.

But I have a hunch about parenting: I think that fathers and mothers enter the child-rearing venture at different times. I think mothers decide to be mothers long before dads decide to be dads. A mother carries a baby for nine months, giving her a chance to grow content with her decision to become a mom.

Dad, however, goes about his daily routine, pretty much unaffected by what's going on inside his wife. Oh, he's supportive and excited, but compared to Mom, he's an observer. Until delivery! Then Dad's world takes on new meaning. He looks into the face of the new life and is confronted with the facts: "I'm the father of this child."

And the realization of that comes home to roost very quickly! This is the point at which dad needs to make a big decision. He needs to decide to become an active, functioning, involved father. And that one critical decision sets up dominoes of decisions he will make for the rest of his life.

Fathering a child is not difficult. But being a father is hard work! It's hard work because deciding to be a father is not just a delivery room decision. It's a decision you have to make every single day that you are a parent.

In his book, *Achieving Success Without Failing Your Family*, the author tells the story of a successful insurance executive who understood the importance of making tough decisions. Speaking at a businessmen's convention, the man stressed the importance of being a father first. The man's daughter was in the audience.

... in the middle of his talk he turned to her and asked, "Sweetheart, do you remember the time I won the million-dollar roundtable three years in a row?"

And she said, "No, Dad, I don't remember that. Sorry..."

"Do you remember the time I got that \$50,000 bonus and we bought a new car?"

And she said, "No, Daddy, I don't remember that. Sorry..."

And then he asked, "Well, do you remember the first of many father-daughter dates we had at the Dairy Queen?"

And she said, "Oh, yes, that I remember!"

And then he turned to the audience to make the point that daughters don't remember when you sell a million dollars worth of insurance, or buy a new car, but they do remember your special dates.

Paul Faulkner, *Achieving Success Without Failing Your Family*, 1994, West Monroe, LA, Howard Publishing Co., pp. 143-144.

My wife's very first date was with her father. Bud Downey took his daughter on a date and at the end of the night, he looked into her eyes and said, "Patty, *this* is how a young man should treat you on a date. Don't accept anything less."

Good dads get involved and stay involved.

The Bible also says a good dad is one who

2. Treasures His Children

Psalms 127 tells me that...

Psalms 127:3 NLT

*Children are a gift from the LORD;
they are a reward from him.*

Children are a gift from God that should be treasured and cherished, especially by Dad.

"Kristin, wake up, it's time to go to school."

She has heard those words hundreds of times in her life. But she heard them for the first time that morning.

I stood in the doorway for awhile before I said anything to her. To tell the truth, I didn't want to say them. I didn't want to wake her. As I stood in the silence that September morning, I realized that my words would awaken her to a brand new world of public school education.

For five lightning-fast years she'd been ours and ours alone. And now that was all going to change.

We put her to bed the night before as "our little girl" —exclusive property of Mom and Dad. Mommy and Daddy read to her, taught her, listened to her. But beginning that day someone else would read to her, too.

Until that day, it was Patty and I who wiped away the tears and put on the Band-Aids. But after that day, someone else would too.

I didn't want to wake her. Until today, her life was essentially us—Mom, Dad, Jamie and Nathan. Today that life would grow— more new friends, a new teacher, a new classroom.

Her world was our house—her room, her toys, her dress up clothes. Today her world would expand. She would enter the winding halls of education—painting, reading, calculating... becoming.

I didn't want to wake her. Not because of the school. It was a great school with a terrific principal. Not because I don't want her to learn. Not because she doesn't want to go. School was all she could talk about for months!

No, I didn't want to wake her up because I didn't want to give her up.

But I woke her anyway. I interrupted her childhood with the inevitable proclamation, "Kristin, wake up ... it's time to go to school."

It took me forever to get dressed. Patty saw me moping around and said, "You'll never make it through her wedding."

We put her on the school bus that morning. I stood and waved until the bus turned the corner. Then I quickly jumped into the car and followed the bus all the way to school, at a safe distance, and watched her get off the bus and skip into the school.

Patty's right. I'll never make it through the wedding.

If I had the power to do so, at that very instant I would have assembled all the hundreds of teachers, instructors, coaches, piano teachers, and tutors that she would have over the next eighteen years, and I would have announced, "This is no normal student. This is my daughter – my precious baby girl. Be careful with her! Don't you mess with her! She is my gift from God, and my reward!"

Psalm 127:3 NLT

*Children are a gift from the LORD;
they are a reward from him.*

And Psalm 8 declares that my baby girl has been crowned with God's glory and God's honour, so please be careful!

Psalm 8:4-5 NIV

...what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour.

But she was all right. One step into the classroom and the cat of curiosity pounced on her. And I drove away. I gave her up. Not much. And not as much as I will have to in the future. But I gave her up as much as I could that day.

As I was reading and thinking about this message more than a month ago – on the long weekend in May, to be exact – two verses from Romans 8 ambushed me.

Romans 8:31-32 NLT

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?

He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for me...for you...and for my children.

I was releasing Kristin into a safe environment with a compassionate teacher who stood ready to wipe away any tears. But Father, you released Jesus into a hostile arena with a cruel soldier who turned the back of your son into raw meat.

I said good-bye to Kristin knowing she would make friends, laugh, and draw pictures. You said good-bye to Jesus knowing he would be spat upon, laughed at, and killed.

I gave up my child fully aware that were she to need me I could be at her side in a heartbeat. You said goodbye to your son fully aware that when he would need you the most, when his cry of despair would roar through the heavens, you would have to sit in silence.

The angels, though positioned, would hear no command from you. Your son, though in anguish, would feel no comfort from your hands.

Romans 8:31-32 NLT

Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?

And what the Father gave me that day was an even deeper appreciation for the gift of my children.

*Children are a gift from the LORD;
they are a reward from him.*

...and as a father, I need to treasure them and cherish them every day of my life.

And right now I'm going to ask one of my rewards to come and help me with this Father's Day message.

Would you please welcome Kristin Leno to our stage?

3. A Good Dad is "There" for His Children

*When I come home from work and see those little noses pressed against the windowpane,
then I know I'm a success. - Paul Faulkner*

This is Father's Day weekend. A day of cologne. A day of hugs, new neckties (lots of them), long-distance phone calls, and Hallmark cards.

Today is the twentieth Father's Day I've had with my dad, and I definitely have one of the best fathers out there. Because a good dad is there for his children.

He is always around to talk to. Always available. Always present. His words are nothing novel. His achievements, though admirable, are nothing extraordinary.

He has published books and dozens of articles in magazines and journals. He has earned four degrees – a bachelor's degree, two masters, and a doctorate. I'm really proud of my dad, and all that he has accomplished. But his presence in my life is more important than any of these material things.

Like a warm fireplace in a large house, he is a source of comfort. Like a giant maple tree in the backyard, he can always be found...and leaned upon.

Growing up, through the hard years of high school, Dad was one part of my life that was predictable and constant. Friends came and went, but my Dad was always there for me.

Summer vacation, piano lessons, my first date, my first recital, my first scholarship, my first car accident – they all had one thing in common: his presence.

And because my dad is there, life goes smoothly. The car always runs, the bills get paid, and the lawn stays mowed. Because he's there, the laughter is plenty and the future, secure. Because he is there my mom feels safe and loved, and my growing up was what God intended growing up to be: a storybook scamper through the magic eyes and mystery mind of a child.

Because he was there, we kids never worried about things like income tax (although my accountant brother seemed to develop a certain interest in this...), savings accounts, monthly bills or mortgages. Those were the things on Dad's desk.

We have lots of family pictures without him. Not because he wasn't there, but because he was always behind the camera, documenting the memories.

He made the decisions, broke up the fights, watched the Evening News every night (volume full-blast), read his bible every morning, and fixed a gourmet breakfast on Saturdays. He doesn't do anything unusual or extraordinary. He only did what dads are supposed to do—be there.

He really tried to live out what it says in 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."

Although I liked to use this as an argument for some situations, I realize that he never *provoked* me to anger. There is a difference there.

So most mistakes we made as children were accompanied by a lesson from Dad, often with Scripture on the side. When I was little, those "lessons" weren't always much fun, but I respect my Dad so much for teaching me to follow God above everything else!

He taught me how to check the oil on my car and how to pray. He helped me memorize verses for Sunday school and taught me that wrong should be punished and that rightness has its own reward. He has instilled in me a love for church, and for becoming involved. I can't tell you how many times I've heard him say, "The local church is the hope of the world." He models the importance of getting up early (which I'm still attempting to grasp) and of staying out of debt... which I've managed so far, but have much to learn about yet! His life expresses the elusive balance between ambition and humility.

Dad comes to mind often. When I smell "Polo Blue" I think of him. Or when I see his brown leather Bible on the kitchen counter, I picture him on the couch doing his early morning

devotions. When I hear the song called "Butterfly Kisses," I can see his tears. And occasionally, not too often, but occasionally when someone cuts in front of me when I'm driving somewhere, I hear my dad's voice. "Windsor has the worst drivers in the world!"

My dad definitely had a tough childhood. I know *his* dad was never there for *him*. And his mother was an alcoholic. She died when he was in high school. He doesn't talk about it much; I know it's painful. But I also know that if I ever wanted to know more, he would tell me. All I have to do was ask. Because he wants to be present. He doesn't want to be distant and impersonal. He wants to *know* me. He wants to be *involved*.

And I know if I ever needed him, he'd be there. He always has.

Conclusion

A lot of fathers ask the question... "How can I be a good dad?" Fathering a child is not difficult. But being a good dad is hard work! But it's not impossible.

You have to get involved, and stay involved in the lives of your children.

Treasure your kids, and remember that every child is a gift from God. Tell them over and over again that you love them.

And just be there. Whatever it takes. Be there for your children. God knows they need you.

So enjoy the rest of the weekend, dad. And God bless you!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

A GOOD DAD GETS INVOLVED AND STAYS INVOLVED

Consequently, it is possible, even common, for a father to forget about fathering—to emotionally disconnect himself from his children. Throughout the day, everyday dads need to renew their "dad" decision.

- What is a "dad" decision?
- What kind of decisions have you had to make as a parent?
- What are some creative solutions to the time demands each mother or father faces?

Kids have a unique set of antennae—not only are they able to see much and hear more, they replay the behaviour they see in their parents.

- Do you agree with the statement above?
- Have your kids or grandchildren ever replayed something they've observed in you? How did it make you feel?
- What is the most important attribute you hope to model for your children or grandchildren?

A GOOD DAD TREASURES HIS CHILDREN

One step into the classroom and the cat of curiosity pounced on her. And I drove away. I gave her up. Not much. And not as much as I will have to in the future. But I gave her up as much as I could that day.

- In what other ways will your boy or girl (grandson or granddaughter) have to be given up in the future?
- Does it help to know that all this “giving up” doesn’t have to be done at once? Why?

I gave up my child fully aware that were she to need me I would be at her side in a heartbeat. You, God, said good-bye to your son fully aware that when he would need you the most, when his cry of despair would roar through the heavens, you would sit in silence. The angels, though positioned, would hear no command from you. Your son, though in anguish, would feel no comfort from your hands.

- Why did God give up his son so completely?
- Imagine, if you can, what it might have been like in heaven’s throne room while Christ suffered on the cross. What is the mood of the angels surrounding God—somber? Sad? Happy? Angry? Confused?

A GOOD DAD IS "THERE" FOR HIS CHILDREN

- What images come to mind when you think of your dad? What words would you use to describe him as a father?
- What God-given role are fathers to play in the lives of their children?
- What do these passages reveal?
Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 78:1-8; Proverbs 3:11-12; Proverbs 13:24, 22:6; Ephesians 6:4, 1 Timothy 3:1-5; 1 Timothy 5:8?
- What positive influences did your dad have on your life? If he is still alive, how could you express your appreciation to him for those things? If he isn’t, to whom could you pass on those blessings?