



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

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“Do Fathers Rule?”

Matthew 1:18-25; 4:21-22; 10:37; 15:3-9; 19:29

Luke 11:11-13, 15:11-32; Ephesians 6:1-4

Dedicate Financial Faith Cards

We’re continuing with our series of sermons about “men”—last week was, “Growing Up Male”; next week we’ll learn about “Men and Women and Marriage.” Today we ask, “Do Fathers Rule?” This series is designed for men, and for the women who love them.

It’s never been easy to be a father, but today, there are extra pressures of life for all of us. Happily, there is help available. [Dads and duct tape video]

And kids are so appreciative of their dads on Fathers Day. Maybe you’ve seen the Toyota ad where Dad gets a tie that looks like an American flag. At first he’s pretty disappointed—another tie?! Then he gets to thinking, and imagines himself in a new Toyota pickup truck, and ties the tie around his head like a rebel bandana, and starts driving the truck off-road, gunning the engine, kicking up dust, and whooping in joy. He snaps back to reality, looks at his child who gave him the gift and says, “I love it!”

I’m not sure how “ties” got “tied” to Fathers Day. Maybe it’s a passing fad, since many firms no longer require suits and ties. It used to be, that the day after Fathers Day, the office water cooler would look like this: [cartoon]

Fathers have not always had much respect in the family. Sure, there was “Father Knows Best” on TV for years, but most of the fathers in TV comedy are bumblers who have smart-mouthed kids—poor men who need help in every episode. Think of Tim Taylor, “The Toolman”, in the show “Home Improvement”, which ran for 202 episodes.

But in recent years, social scientists and psychologists have discovered that fathers make crucial contributions to their children as they grow up. While a mother’s and father’s care for children overlaps a lot, there are some contributions—essential contributions—that fathers especially can make, and be a blessing to their children.

Like last week, let’s begin with the Word of our Designer, from the Word of God. We’re going to concentrate on what Jesus said about fathers, and the kind of father care he enjoyed. Open your Bibles first to Matthew, chapter 1. We’re going to read verses 18-25, and learn something about the character of Jesus’ father. Listen with me for God’s Word to us today, as I

read these words aloud. [text]

Life had dealt Joseph a blow. His hopes and dreams for a simple life with his young wife had suddenly gone south. She was pregnant, and it could not have been him. Now, especially in that culture, women had to be technical virgins as they approached their wedding night. Absent certification from her family, and proof on the wedding night, the woman was ‘damaged goods’; she would suffer humiliation and even death. Divorce was expected; the father would have to return the ‘bride price’ the husband had given—all those sheep, or cattle, or whatever--and she would likely never marry. Little wonder that ritual killings of “spoiled brides” grew up in that part of the world.

We can only imagine what Joseph was thinking. We get from the text that he did not want to publicly shame Mary over this. He was ready to divorce Mary quietly. But God intervened, and told Joseph to go through with the wedding anyway. “This is my child,” says the Lord. “You will raise him as mine.”

Joseph honored what God told him, despite his own feelings about it, despite the social rules of his day, and without any other promises. (Later, he and Mary did have a number of children of their own, for we read that Jesus had brothers and sisters.) Joseph shows us strong character. This is the man who raised Jesus. Joseph’s willingness to listen and obey God would be something his son would learn well.

Now we turn to a later part of Matthew’s gospel record, chapter 4, verses 21-22. It’s just a short shot, as Jesus is calling his disciples. What is God saying to us through His Word here?
[text]

In a similar vein, in his teaching ministry, Jesus showed us and told us that importance of “family”, but the greater importance of God’s Kingdom. Here is one sample, from Matthew 10:37, and 19:29: “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”

If we just read these verses, we think Jesus is casting off any value for family. But stay with me. Turn now to Matthew 15:3-9. This one will take a little explaining. Jesus is starting to have more challenges from the Senior Pastors and serious Bible students, as Dale Bruner calls them. Here he takes on one of their corrupt practices. Where is God’s voice in this passage?
[text]

Is this clear to you? Apparently some of the very religious among these religious champions were angry with their own parents. As adults, they had the social obligation to care for their parents as they aged and until they died. Sometimes, they brought the folks into their own homes; those who could afford it might channel some of their money to mom and dad so they could live in their old place. But for some of these “religious professionals” who had a poisoned relationship with their parents, they were taking a chunk of their own resources and giving the money to the synagogue or Temple, SO THAT their parents would get nothing from them. They got the satisfaction of punishing their parents, while getting recognition from the synagogue or temple for their gift, too. “How is this praised holy practice honoring your father and your mother?” asks Jesus. There is no answer. Obviously, family care is important to Jesus.

Now, let's shift to the fathers' side of this. Look up Luke 11:11. There are parallel passages in the other gospels, but I picked up the Luke version because it's extra sharp for our purpose today. Jesus says, "¹¹Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

And to finish off our quick tour of "Jesus, on Fathers", we go to the place you were probably expecting—Luke 15, starting with verse 11. We usually hear that this is the story of "the Prodigal Son", but I think it would be better if we focus on the father today, for this is really the story of The Prodigal Father. *[text]*

Jesus tells a story, and everyone—didn't you also?—pictures the drama unfolding as the wayward kid slumps toward home. This father is amazing. First, of all, you need to know that just as with the threat to Mary as she came up pregnant before Joseph had a chance to be the father of her child, so this wayward son was at grave risk. Farmlands in that time were outside the village, but instead of individual houses on the family land, everyone's home was huddled together in the village, often with common walls. Talk about "small town--everyone in the village would know what this kid had said and done to his father—in effect, saying, "Drop dead, Dad!" And so this kid, if caught, would be killed by the villagers out of rage at what he had done—and just as the Law of Moses also required. So when this father lifts up his robe to run out to the boy, not only is he humiliating himself in front of the whole village by showing the skin of his legs, he is racing to get to the kid before the villagers do. He's saving his son's life. And this prodigal love goes on—he welcomes the kid back, puts new clothes on him, puts the official "seal of the father" ring on his finger so he has authority again—and throws a huge party!

With both of his boys, this father wants great relationships, relationships based not on authority, but on love. This dad is generous beyond measure—and he reminds his older "good" son—who is filled with resentment that has probably bubbled a long time and now boils over—that he, too, had pre-possession of everything in the family.

And now finally a word from Paul, as he instructs fathers and children about their family relationships, in Ephesians 6:1-4: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth' Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Do you hear the mutuality in this? Don't you want your kids to grow up to be able to raise their own children well? Dads, how can you model that for them, and with them, now?

So let's pull this together. Fathers are powerful models--with their words, but especially by their actions. When you build healthy relationships with your kids—not just try to "teach them stuff"—you set them up for self-esteem and success. Social psychologists have underlined this as they examined the family lives of young women and men in the juvenile justice system and adult prison. Where the father was absent, abusive, or distant—whether or not he was a good provider—the kids often went wrong in their lives, made bad decisions, had little empathy for others. Most of the time in families where the fathers were present, nurturing, and consistently firm, the kids turned out much better. Fathers have a huge impact on a child's self-esteem, and their confidence in the world. By demonstrating you believe in your kid's ability to

learn, grow, achieve, love, make mistakes, repair relationships, you dads can impact your child's inner life positively and powerfully.

Now, most of us did not have perfect parents. So we carry around inside us models that are not always the best. Maybe we got constantly criticized, out of the mistaken notion that we were being made tougher, or better. But all that does is instill fear which can come out as depression, or people-pleasing, or loss of self, or defiant distancing. So if your dad was not all that great with you, how will you choose to be a great dad with your kids?

What will you choose, as you go home with your kids today? Will you talk with your child and really listen, as if she or he is a real person, with feelings and ideas worth listening to—not only for themselves, but what that shows you about your child's inner life and growth and character? What kind of person do you hope your child will become by age 18, or 21? What can you do now, so that your child can take one more step in that direction? What if they make a mistake now? Can you have the patience to help them 'get it' themselves, so they're motivated to do better themselves, and not just to please (or avoid) you? How will you improve their home?

The absolute best thing you can do for your child is to love the child's mother. You and your wife can argue, but your kids need to see you work that through. They need to see you apologize to her and grow, yourself. Get help if you need it. (Most of us did not see the world's best marriages, either, so we don't have automatic models to follow ourselves.) Love your wife, and show your kids how.

One more thing you can do that will positively impact your kids—let them see your personal relationship with God. Let them see and hear how you pray, which means you will have to speak some personal prayers, not just lead family prayers. Let them see you read the Bible yourself, asking God to speak to you through the text. THAT's how you pass on your faith and help your kids value God. Yes talk about God, but if you love God as Jesus demonstrated, then let your kids see that, and how God guides your decisions.

A final word about absent fathers. There are other men who can lend a hand in raising kids; we call them 'mentors' now. It can be a family member, or a man in the church. Other men of good character can share their lives of love in their families, and with God. And you other men, many of you are grandfathers now. You raised kids once. How well did you do? Would you like a "do-over" from some of those times? Will you get ready to mentor a child—a girl, or especially a boy—toward adulthood? Would you take a kid from another family with you on a trip, or spend a Saturday once in a while with a child who is not your own? Like Joseph, this child would not be yours, but would be yours by extension, if you choose. Treat the kids like a real person. Let them see your love for your wife, and your love for God. What an impact you could make, on your own grandchildren, or on the life of another older child or youth!

Here's a film example of what I mean. ["Unsung hero—Dad" video]

Dads, don't rule—love the ones you're with, and show the way of life, with the kind of love God shows us. Let your kids love you, too. That's how fathers get their real authority. That's how the kids grow up to say, "Fathers rule!"

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on Father's Day, June 17, 2007, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]