



University Christian Church-Austin

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A Father's Love  
Pentecost 2, b, Fathers Day, June 21, 2009  
Hosea 11:1-4 & Ephesians 6:1-4

A family had three small children who were determined to have their own little puppy dog. Mom protested because she knew that somehow or other, she would end up caring for the pup. The children solemnly promised that they would take care of it. Finally she relented and they brought their little puppy home. They named him Danny and cared for him diligently - at first. But, sure enough, as time passed, Mom found herself becoming more and more responsible for taking care of the dog. Finally, she decided that the children were not living up to their promise so she began to search for a new home for Danny. When she found one and broke the news to the children, she was quite surprised that they had almost no reaction at all. One of them even said rather matter-of-factly, "We'll miss him."

"I'm sure we will," Mom answered, "but he is too much work for one person and since I'm the one that has to do all the work, I say he goes."

"But," protested another child, "if he wouldn't eat so much and wouldn't be so messy, could we keep him?"

Mom held her ground, "It's time to take Danny to his new home." Suddenly, with one voice and with tears in their eyes, the children exclaimed, "Danny? We thought you said Daddy!"

It's Fathers' Day! It is the day that we celebrate a FATHERS' LOVE.

The idea for creating a day for children to honor their fathers began in Spokane, Washington. A woman by the name of Sonora Smart Dodd thought of the idea for Father's Day while listening to a Mother's Day sermon in 1909, precisely 100 yrs. ago. Having been raised by her father, Henry Jackson Smart, after her mother died, Sonora wanted her father to know how special he was to her. It was her father that made all the parental sacrifices and was, in the eyes of his daughter, a courageous, selfless, and loving man. Sonora's father was born in June, so she chose to hold the first Father's Day celebration in Spokane, Washington on the 19th of June, 1910.

It took 14 years for the notion to catch on in a really big way. Finally, in 1924 President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed the third Sunday in June as Father's Day.

It should come as no surprise to you that the Bible holds for us plenty of recommendations about our fathering and our mothering .....

**1.)** Proverbs 22:6 says:

**“Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.”**

That is a wonderful hope for those of us who are fathers... or mothers. Though there are exceptions, often it seems to work out just that way.

We love our kids - and treat them well - and sometimes they turn away from us; sometimes they journey on roads that we do not understand or approve of; but in the end - if our hearts are open - if the foundation is well laid - we often see them return to us - as the Prodigal Son in Jesus' parable returned to his Father.

**2.)** When we read from the Prophet Hosea today we hear it in an especially appropriate way because that passage speaks of how God loved the people of Israel as if they were God's own children – God's own

wayward children. Hosea speaks of God's care for them such that despite all the evil that they did and all the bad decisions that they made, God continued to lead them with cords of human kindness and ties of love – how God continued to lift the yoke from their necks and bend down to feed them.

It is powerful stuff - the love that God has for Israel... and the love God has for us - and that love is the way that we are called to raise our children. But we can't do it - we can't be successful parents unless we parents walk in the way that God wants us to walk.

3.) In Ephesians - and again in Colossians - Paul shares this as we heard in Ron's reading:

**"Children, obey your parents in the Lord - for this is right. Honour your mother and father - which is the first commandment, with a promise – that it may go right with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."**

That was a hard passage to hear when I was a teenager. Now, I love it!

Then Paul writes:

**"Fathers, do not provoke your children - do not exasperate your children - instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."**

Another version reads,

**"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."**

Now, I know some of you aspiring Biblical scholars out there don't think too highly of the Apostle Paul. And you know that I'll stand up for the old guy time and again. But whatever you may usually think of Paul – you've got to admit these last words are surely inspired.

**Do not provoke, do not exasperate your children**

Be careful that your parenting does not become overbearing,

Be careful that your words and actions say the same thing...

Do not break your promises to them -

Do not neglect them -

And though Paul doesn't mention it, we know through personal experience, that there is an opposite extreme to be avoided as well:

**Do not mindlessly indulge their every whim so  
that they lose all respect for you.**

This may be an especially appropriate word to some of you Grandparents, too. I know a whole bunch of Grandparents who truly believe it their singular duty to shower their beloved grandchildren with every gift imaginable. And, of course, the kids will sing your praises if that's what you do. But everyone will benefit in the long run if instead of always trying to keep your Grandchildren happy with you, instead you work hard to back their parents' instilling of responsibility.

Bring up your children and your grandchildren, **in the training and instruction of God....**

Do you think the children learn from that training up? Listen to these reports.

A group of adults—NOT from this congregation - were asked to describe the best thing that their father ever did for them. I would like to share a four of them with you.

From a woman named Nancy: "The best thing my dad ever did was read to me every evening before dinner. He read to me the new National Geographic when it came in. He read to me when he found a poem he liked."

From Cathy – “My Dad has done so many nice things - he coached my softball and soccer teams throughout my entire childhood, shared a love of learning, and always had time to listen whenever any of his kids had a problem. The most recent nice thing was that when I moved across the country to attend graduate school, he took a week of work, drove across country in a rented van and was great company during the trip.”

From Robert – “Dad was always there for us and helped us out of every situation we ever got into -- and he never threw it back in our faces or got angry about having to rescue us. I once was desperately ill with mono and had to drive his car to the doctor's office. On the way one of engine gaskets broke and all the oil drained out of the engine - but I kept driving because I was so sick. Dad said he could follow the trail of oil down the road when he went to pick up the car. But he never once yelled at me for destroying the car and making him buy a new engine.”

From Emma – “When I was very young my dad's job took him to Paris for a few weeks. It seemed like a lifetime to me at three years old - , but he sent me a postcard every day. Thirty years later I still have them and they remind me of how special I am to him.”

What unites these stories from these four respondents are their fathers’ personal care and loving attention - in the little things - and in the big things.

Suggestive isn't it of what we fathers - and grandfathers ought to be about? Suggestive, too, for mothers and grandmothers - and for men and women everywhere.

There are many ways we can show our love for our children, but whatever way we do - it sure helps to love life, to enjoy the gift and the challenge of family life in particular. It helps if we have a visible love for God, not in a dry moralistic, stern doctrinal way but in a liberating, joyful,

personal manner that invites emulation. That kind of love communicates itself so positively to everyone around, but especially the children.

Parenting is never easy. Being a father - or a mother - brings serious challenges, often brings tremendous pains - as well as incredible joys. Parenting well may be our very best gift we offer back in response to God's gifts to us. So keep this in mind. We can do no better thing for our children than personally walking in the way we should go, striving to fulfill every potential for spiritual and social development, so that we can in turn bring our children up in that way>

“Train children in the right way, and when old they will not stray.”

May God give us wisdom, strength, and patience for this noble task!