

Father's Day, June 21, 2020
"A Good Father Is..."

A pastor was quizzing the children during the children's sermon about the influences in their lives.

Who taught you to count? he asked.

Tommy piped up and said, *My Dad taught me to count.*

Great, said the pastor. *Let's see how well he did. What comes after eight?*

Nine, Tommy answered confidently.

And what comes after nine? asked the pastor.

Ten, Tommy said triumphantly.

And what comes after ten? asked the pastor.

A jack, said Tommy.

We learn a lot of things from our fathers, don't we? But more often than not, fathers are portrayed in a less than positive light. Just look at the sitcoms on TV. Many of the fathers are portrayed as dense, disconnected, and clueless about what is going on in their families. It seems they are there only to offer the occasional wise crack.

Such portrayals make for good comedy, but the responsibilities God has given fathers is nothing to laugh at. So, on this Father's Day I want us to look at some of the characteristics a good father should possess. Even though we don't have a lot of young fathers in our congregation, I hope our time together will be beneficial for grandfathers, mothers and grandmothers, any of us who have an influence over children. We will look at these characteristics by using the word "father" as an acrostic.

First of all, a good father is faithful – faithful to God and faithful to his spouse. A faithful father is one who is in communion with his God, one who regularly reads God's word, goes to God in prayer, worships regularly with his family, and one who puts the tenets of his faith into daily practice.

He is also one who reminds his children how much God loves them. With my own children, I just assumed they knew they were loved by God. They grew up singing *Jesus Loves Me and* this is what they were taught Sunday School and church. But with age has come wisdom. I've learned that it is important to reinforce this truth – especially from those they love and trust. So I've begun something new with my grandchildren in recent months. After a visit, I'll hug them and say, *Jesus loves you, and P-paw loves you.* I don't think we can ever tell them enough about God's love for them.

A faithful father is also one who loves his wife. Some say that the best thing a dad can do for his children is to love their mother. Truth is, our children are always watching and learning. If they see us practicing faithful discipleship, evangelism, and stewardship, they will know that God is a priority in our lives, and the Christian faith will become an important part of their lives as well, equipping them to face any challenge that life might bring.

And if they see dads show love and respect to their mother, it will teach our sons how to be good husbands and fathers and our daughters never to be satisfied with a man who dishonors her. A good father is faithful.

A good father is also available. The demands of work and other activities can consume a lot of our time. And then there are the hobbies we enjoy. But when we spend a lot of time in activities that do not involve our children, it sends them the message that everything else takes priority over them. They may even begin to wonder if they are loved.

A good father spends time with his children. Some will argue that it is the quality of the time spent, rather than the quantity. But that is only justification for fathers to be absent. Quantity *does* matter. Just ask any child.

Being available also means that we be attentive. We need to listen to our children and give them our undivided attention – and not with one eye on our smart phone or the TV. We need to get involved with them and know what’s going on in their lives, giving them a place to express their hopes and a place to have their fears calmed.

When children feel that they are being heard, then they will come to us when life gets more complicated and they have bigger problems. A good father is available.

And a good father is a teacher. Proverbs says that if we train a child in the way he should go, then when he is old, he won’t depart from it. We need to teach our children. We need to teach them right from wrong. We need to teach them compassion and justice. But above all, we need to teach them respect, not only for their parents and other people in authority, but respect for God. If we don’t teach them to respect authority in the home, then they won’t respect authority anywhere else. They need to know that there are boundaries, rules and regulations, lines that they cannot cross.

We must be consistent in our teaching, and when they test us, discipline them with love, or they will never respect the authority of God in their lives or the authority of anyone else. A good father is a teacher.

A good father is also humble. Now I know that humility is not something to which most men aspire. But a little humility will take us a long way in being good fathers. We must understand that we are not perfect. We must also understand that we are not always right. *My word is the law around here* kind of attitude will only serve to prevent a child from exploring things on their own and discovering who they are in relation to the world around them.

And because we are not perfect in our role as parent, we should be humble enough to know we need help. In humility, we should turn to God in prayer, knowing that, on our own, we can’t have all the wisdom, love, and patience to be the father we ought to be. So we need to pray that God will help us in the awesome responsibility he has given us.

We also need to pray for our children. We can’t be with them all the time, can’t protect them everywhere they go, can’t be present when all we have taught them is put to the test. But God

can. So we need to lift them up in prayer for God to do for them what we can't do. Pray that God will take your well-intentioned efforts at fatherhood and use them to make your children into the people God desires them to be. A good father is humble.

A good father is encouraging. Just as there are no perfect fathers, there are no perfect children, and we can't expect them to be. They are going to mess up from time to time. They are not going to meet all our expectations, or fulfill all the goals we have for them, or be what we want them to be. Still, we must accept them for who they are – for who God made them to be – whether they are athletic or clumsy intelligent or scatterbrained, shy or very outgoing, goofy or sophisticated.

Instead of constantly criticizing their imperfections, we need to love them for who they are and offer the encouragement they need when they do mess up or fail at something that is important to them. An ounce of praise and encouragement will do much more for our children than a ton of criticism. A good father is encouraging.

Finally, a good father is a role model. Like it or not, we are role models for our children. We can be a good role model or a bad one, but to some degree or another, our children will model their lives after us. Each of us has inherited some of our father's characteristics and our children are inheriting some of ours. Whether we know it or not, we are influencing their lives and even the lives of our children's children. So, it is up to us to model the characteristics we want to see in our children. We can't say, *Do as I say, and not as I do*. What message does that send? We need to put our words into action.

To sum up, the characteristics of a good father are being faithful to God and their mother; being available – physically and emotionally; teaching them about God and the right way to live; being humble enough to know that you don't have all the answers and need God's help; encouraging them to be the best they can be; and being a positive role model.

These are the things our children need in us – fathers, mothers, grandfathers, and grandmothers, alike – and these are the things that will prepare them for the day they leave home and go out to make their own way in the world. May we, with God's help, equip them to do just that.