

Every Child Needs A Father

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Last Sunday, for the first time in, well, my entire life, I could not wish my Dad a Happy Father's Day. Sadly there are tens of millions of young children without a father in their lives. A two parent home is God's ideal plan, (Genesis 2), but unfortunately unforeseen circumstances often intervene in life, such as desertion either before or following the birth of a child, divorce, or death. At a far greater rate than at any time in our history, we now have huge percentages of children being raised in one-parent homes. Barbara and I both came from two-parent homes, and having raised our two children, I cannot imagine the challenges and difficulties in raising a child by myself.

As for my Dad, he was great! He passed away at the age of 91 just a couple of weeks following Father's Day last year. It was sad, but boy do I have some great memories growing up as his son.

Mom and Dad had three children (me being the oldest), and our maternal grandmother lived with us as well. Our home was always filled with much love, laughter, books, music, a sense of responsibility, and a strict adherence to the Roman Catholic Faith. The church part of our lives was Mom's desire, and Dad just sort of came along for the ride.

We lived in what was then called a "shotgun house" in the Germantown section of Louisville, Ky. There were six of us in a maybe 850 square foot, one bath house, the same home in which my mother was born 85 years ago and continues to live in to this day. Dad was self-taught with maybe a 6th grade education, having gone to work at 13 to help support his widowed mother and two younger sisters during the Depression. He never made what anyone would consider a lot of money, but he always made a good living for his family, and we always had everything we needed, sometimes even more. Most importantly Mom and Dad provided the love, security, and happiness in that home, and those are easily my fondest childhood memories.

Although I had never traveled more than a hundred miles from home until I was almost 18 years old, the world was already becoming my oyster. One of Dad's first lessons conveyed to his children was that books could take us anywhere in the world.

Dad was never too busy to talk to his children, to help us, play with us or to give us advice, even sometimes when we did not ask. And what was to become the most important journey of my life was in no small part due to the training I had from my father. Dad always taught us to question, discuss, doubt, and investigate, whether we were talking about politics, history, or even religion.

Sometime in my teens I gave up on Catholicism, and until I met Barbara, religion was simply not one of my priorities. But once married, Barbara was insistent that we have a God-centered home. And so began my years-long journey in quest of THE church.

I will always believe that Dad was the perfect father for me, but since my parents were Catholic and would hear nothing of any other religions, I had to figure that part out for myself. Ultimately, each child must reach that point where he either rejects or accepts the faith of his youth.

Look at some father/son relationships in scripture. Do the children of God-fearing men always follow THE FAITH? Are children of less than faithful parents doomed to lose their souls?

Life is complicated, and all things, including families, are not ideal. Consider some of the most famous father/son stories in scripture. Adam, Cain and Abel; Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael; Isaac, Jacob and Esau. Consider the situation and circumstances of Eli and all of his sons.

Possibly the most ironic and certainly among the saddest Bible stories regarding father/son relationships and influence (or lack thereof) can be found in the books of Samuel and Kings. They revolve around the families of the first two kings of Israel, Saul, and David. Just think about the physical and moral courage of Jonathan, the son of Saul, the king God would reject. Now contrast Jonathan to the sons of David, the man who was anointed by God, a man after God's own heart!

Fathers, take nothing for granted when it comes to your children. Love them, teach them, encourage them, support them, discipline them, and most importantly, of course, *"raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"* (Ephesians 6:4). That is all we can do. And then, as did Jonathan and Absalom, the children will or will not follow the encouragement and heed the warnings of Joshua just before he departed this life (Joshua 24:14-15).

Would I have "found" the Lord's church had I been raised in another home? Would I have rebelled had I been raised in the church? Who knows? Without the encouragement and support of a wonderful wife, I dare NOT think where I would be today. But I also thank God every day for the father AND the mother to whom I was entrusted by my Heavenly Father. Dad taught me to think for myself, to question, and to have the courage of my conviction, regardless even of what he thought. For that training and encouragement I'll always be thankful he was my Dad.