God’s Opportunities for Fathers

Fathers’ Day 2019

Resource book – Famous Fathers by Paul Lewis

# Scripture: Eph. 6:4; Gen. 18:19; 48:9

# Key Thought: The Bible describes three key opportunities that God gives to fathers.

# Intro:

We all know that fathers are crucial for raising children. They are essential. Growing boys need a father to help them understand through their modeling what it means to be a man. But fathers are essential for their influence on daughters as well. Counselors dealing with women identify quickly a syndrome called “father absent.” The counselor can usually tell from the behavior that a woman was raised without significant healthy interaction with a father-figure.

The Bible has some very helpful things to say about being a father. I’d like to think of three of these teachings today as helping us as fathers to understand and take full advantage of the privilege of being a father. All of them are equally relevant for grandfathers and for those who serve as father figures to others who are not biologically their children. Thank God for those who are in both of those crucial roles!

# A father is a trainer of his children

## The father’s powerful influence

Looking at the verse we read in Ephesians 4, we can see that a part of the father’s role is to be a trainer, an educator, a discipler for his children. Paul tells us that a father’s job description includes specifically the spiritual training and instruction of children.

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:4 NIV

Notice first, this immediately negates any attempt by fathers to pass off the training of their children to their wives – as if it were their job to do that while the fathers did other things, like work, or play, or watch TV. Father’s cannot duck this responsibility or pass it off on someone else. As soon as they do, there will be negative consequences.

One of the things about my father that I remember clearly was him serving as Sunday School Superintendent. Those were the days of a separate Sunday School hour and of Sunday School opening exercises as they were called – that is the classes all met together for a few minutes before going to their individual classes. Our little country church with about 55 attenders had about 6 Sunday school classes- two or three adult, and three or four children and teen. Those opening exercises my father led were motivational time and one of the jobs of SS leader was to stir up enthusiasm. My Dad was good at that. He showed his heart for God’s work. I was influenced by that.

As another example, when I was growing up, there was a family next door that had 7 children. When the older children were growing up, the father attended church regularly with the family. The older children became avid church attenders. One of the two older boys even became a minister. Then something happened in relationships as sometimes occurs–I was never told what–and the father in the family quit going to church at all. I don’t even remember him coming to Christmas programs. The mother continued to attend every week. Long-term result - the two youngest children, both sons, did not follow God at all.

Statisticians tell us that the father’s influence is disproportional. If the father is a regular church attender and the mother does not attend, a significantly higher percentage of the children will follow in his Christian example than happens statistically if the mother is a regular attender and the father does not attend. It doesn’t seem fair, but it shows the power of the father’s influence.

Yet sadly, another stat that I saw indicates that while Mother’s Day has been statistically among the highest days for church attendance in the year, in some churches even competing with Easter and Christmas; Father’s Day ranks among the lowest, right up there with Memorial Day weekend, Fourth of July Weekend, and Labor Day weekend. While part of this is due to where those days happen to fall in the calendar and to their relationship to the school year, some of it is also because fathers do not recognize the power of their influence from a spiritual standpoint. So, the family honors Mom by going to church with her, while the family honors Dad by going fishing or to a ballgame with him. Why the difference in perspective in our culture? Because we grossly underestimate the power of the father’s spiritual influence.

## How does the father train his children?

Second we need to ask, “How do we train and instruct?”

### Being an example

The number one way that a father trains his children is by being an example. We learn best as we unconsciously model after those who have gone before us. A good example is the best way to teach.

### Teaching, instructing as opportunity and ability make possible.

But Fathers are active teachers too. They use teachable moments, answer questions, and use stories with a point. They read the Bible and ask questions to help children think. They help child learn to reason morally about events in life, helping them understand the why’s behind their thinking.

For example: Suppose you are driving a teen child home from an event and a song with questionable lyrics comes on the radio. You might say ask, “What do you think about the words of that song?” It provides an opportunity for a conversation about a moral value.

### Guiding input.

Today, one of the huge jobs of parents is guiding the inputs that children receive. All our children today are growing up loving videos. Annabelle, who is 4, calls them her “shows.” Sam who is only 7 craves iPad time. Yet even the most innocent-looking cartoons have messages. They are not made simply to entertain. They are made to influence. Parents need to be aware of the agendas of the shows their children love. What are the values portrayed? One thing that disturbs me in my limited exposure to children’s literature today is that we have books and film for children that are written in such a way that the children admire the villain. So, they talk about and model after the villain in the story. There is something fundamentally morally wrong with that kind of input for children. It confuses the moral sense of the unsuspecting child and makes the job of their parents and moral teachers much harder as they try to help the child learn to recognize right and wrong, good and evil.

Of course, one of the big problems with this last issue–and we need to admit this up front–adults are terrible at being conscious of the values and influencing agendas of the shows they watch for themselves. For example, most of America decries the violence that we see in our society. Yet, what kind of movies often get high ratings? -- Movies with violence. If you still turn on TV which I seldom do, you can hardly watch a show without some grisly murder in it. What kinds of sports are rising – the most violent kinds of mixed martial arts. Our society does not recognize the influence of what it feeds itself. What is the chance it will recognize the influence of what it feeds the children?

In the church, we need to be wiser. Christian fathers must be aware of the influences they promote and those they allow for children under their care.

By setting a climate in the family that encourages the proper types of learning.

One of the positive things a good father does is share with his wife in setting a climate in the home and in the family schedule that encourages the proper types of learning.

Where do you take your children? What types of activities you do together has a huge influence. What things to you prioritize? Do you demonstrate that being in church together as a family is important? What learning activities do you make sure your children attend? What priorities do you set? What kind of people will you expose them to? When they come of age to consider colleges, will you encourage them to consider a Christian college? What kinds of friends do you have? How much and what kinds of things do you watch on video or internet. Many years ago now, I was assigned in my church responsibilities to be a camp counselor for a week to third grade boys. In the evening the conversation happened to turn to the movies they had watched with their parents. I was shocked to learn that for this group of boys at church camp, most of them had watched R rated movies with their parents.

Acting responsibly is just one of the principles underlying the fathering style of [Luis Palau,] world-famous evangelist. He keeps pressing toward his goal of nurturing steady and strong personal development in each of his four sons – patterns he prays will fall in lockstep with the biblical values he teaches. And because Luis Palau recognizes the dangerous explosions [that] pressuring a child into molds of conformity can trigger, he wisely relies more on well-timed suggestions and the power of personal example that upon fatherly edicts. (Famous Fathers by Paul Lewis p. 98)

# A father is a leader in his family

Did you ever wonder why God chose Abraham as the one through whom he would develop the chosen people of God? Actually, the Bible tells us one of the most important reasons that God chose Abraham.

“I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." Genesis 18:19 NIV

Bible is clearly saying that the purpose – the end for which God called Abraham was that he would direct the affairs of his family in such a way that those who came after him would also follow the LORD and would do what was right and just. God knew that Abraham would do just that. In our modern terms, he was expected to be a spiritual leader in his family. He was expected to provide for the discipleship of his children.

Another Biblical example of a good father in leadership was Mordecai. Interestingly, Mordecai was not Esther’s biological father, he was her first cousin (Esther 2:7 KJV) but he adopted Esther as his own after her parents both died.

One of the ways that a father leads his family is by, in consultation with his wife, guiding the kind of experiences that he chooses for his family. These will mold their lives in many and sometimes unforeseen ways.

For example, one of the choices I made as a father, and my wife agreed upon, was to visit churches of different types often on vacation. When I was young, I chose churches to learn – sometimes we even visited two on a single Sunday morning, attending the early service at one church and the second service at another. When I was a little older I chose churches because of relationships to friends or family and didn’t do the two churches in one day thing anymore.

But, looking back, I believe that this act of encouraging my family to visit different churches paid unexpected dividends for Keely. In her young adult years, she moved several times, as young adults usually do. As any of you know that have moved, finding a new church is not easy. But Keely has not been afraid to visit different churches or to attend very different churches with friends. I like to think it might be at least in part due to that early family choice of visiting other churches when we could.

While Keely was growing up, we did not have a lot of money or vacation time, but we still tried to visit parks, and historical places of interest when we could. We made it to Disneyworld in Florida once and took one big trip to some Western National Parks. Somewhere along the line, Keely developed a love for travel. She hated camping, but loved travel. She signed up for a French student exchange program in high school and for a London semester during college. And she has loved traveling ever since.

My point is simply that the choices you make as a family have a long shadow. One of the tasks of parents is to be as intentional about crafting that future influence. It is part of leading the family.

# A father is a priest for his family

## Jacob’s blessings

There is a third Biblical incident that I would like to highlight as we think together about the role of fathers. In applies to fathers and grandfathers especially. It is one of the most moving scenes in all of Genesis. When he was about to die, the Patriarch Jacob, also known as Israel, from whom the nation of Israel gets its name, called for all his sons and his grandsons by Joseph together around him so that he could bless them. Well, in the case of some of his sons, the blessing sounds a little more like a curse. But I’m especially moved by the example of Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph. As Joseph brought his sons to his father, the Bible records the conversation.

"They are the sons God has given me here," Joseph said to his father. Then Israel said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them." Genesis 48:9 NIV

There is an extended story there, but Genesis 48:20 records,

He blessed them that day and said,  
“In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing: ‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.’” Gen 48:20 NIV

## Your words of blessing

The words you say in your family come back to you. Words of encouragement tend to be repeated back to me when I need them most. Words of grumbling that I say soon come out of the mouths of other family members.

What kind of words does God want spoken into the mind of your child? You can be that voice! Here are seven suggestions.

* Speak words of encouragement to others in your family.
* Remind them of their blessings in Jesus.
* Using your own words, remind them of Scriptural truths that encourage then in their current situations. Here are some examples for starters.
  + God is always with you (Heb. 13:5).
  + God says he has plans to prosper you not to harm you (Jer. 29:11)
  + God is your refuge and strength (Psalm 46:1)
* Put your child’s name in a Scripture verse such as Ephesians 3:20,21.
* Claim a Bible promise for them.
* When they are sick, touch their head or their shoulder or hold their hand and pray for them.
* Pray a Bible verse over them to bless them on their birthday.

## Your prayers of blessing

It is one of the great privileges of fathers as well as mothers to pray and say words of blessing over their children, both formal and informal, both words of scripture and extemporaneous. It is part of what I call the priestly role of fathers.

I bless my grandson in an informal way every time I tell him he is Grandpa’s precious boy. And I say similar words to my granddaughter. Sometimes when they eat at my house, they say grace, but sometimes I do and when I do, I often pray for them by name.

When both Sam and Annabelle were placed in my arms for the first time, my first act as their grandfather, was to place my hand upon their head and recite the words of blessing that God instructed the priests of Israel to recite over the people.

“Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

“‘“The Lord bless you and keep you;   
the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;  
the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”’

“So, they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” Num. 6:23-27 NIV

Since Jesus came, the Bible says that we, the people of God, are a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). What can that mean if it does not include the idea of praying for one another and passing on the blessing that God has given us for the people of God? So, fathers and grandfathers, pray for your family and bless them with your words and with your prayers. Your words, like Jacobs, have power. Use them to bless.

Many of you will remember Noel Paul Stookey of Peter Paul and Mary fame. You may not have known that he became a Christian. As a father, Noel Paul Stookey writes about leading prayers for his family at dinner time and other times.

“I love to say off-the-wall graces,” Noel admits. “We take turns. They may not be brief. They deal with the problems or joys of the day. They sometimes ask for strength. They express what I pray is the individual response to God’s calling in each of my children’s lives. God has dealt with me very individually. His gentleness has encouraged me to write about him. And so, because that rang so true in my life and talent, I feel that’s what I must bring to my family. I don’t mind being the spokesman.”

“The thing that has emerged most predominate in our prayers for the last three or four months has been thanking God for the hardships, for the tests, for the ability to develop strengths, knowing that he loves us, that he is there.” Noel recognizes that each family member must develop a personal prayer relationship with God. So, prayers at night are left to each child. “There are times when we will pray together at night, but there are many times when I’ll say, ‘Don’t forget to mention that in your prayers.’”

Noel Paul Stookey p. 73 in Famous Fathers by Paul Lewis

## Your opportunities to fill a priestly role

If you are a person with Christian clear testimony in your family, whether man or woman, there are various occasions where you may be offered the opportunity to serve a priestly function. Have you ever been the one who was asked to say grace at a large family gathering? What a privilege! What an opportunity to be priest for the entire family. Have you ever been asked to say a prayer at an important family occasion such as the celebration of the baptism of the child? It’s another opportunity to be a priest for the extended family and to say a prayer of blessing. You might also be the one in the family circle who has a chance to lead in prayer in a tragic circumstance such as when the family gathers around the bedside of a loved one who has passed. It is a holy and precious opportunity to be the priest for the family. Don’t miss it.

Sometimes we get this same opportunity for leading in prayers for a quasi-family that is not our own. Have you ever been asked to say the blessing for a class reunion? To lead a time of remembrance for a social organization remembering those who have passed? I’ve taken advantage for many of these kinds of opportunities and I’ve missed a few these opportunities too. Many of them never return. But if we are open and looking, God will send us opportunities to be a blessing in the priestly prayers that he gives us opportunities to bring, whether we are men or women.

# Conclusion

Poem that gives perspective – Dad’s Greatest Job (SP-FA)

I may never be as clever as my neighbors down the street,

I may never be as wealthy as some other men I meet;

I may never have the glory that some other men have had,

But I’ve got to be successful as a little fellow’s dad.

There are certain dreams I cherish that I’d like to see come true,

There are things I would accomplish ‘ere my working time is through,

But the task my heart is set on is to guide a little lad

and to make myself successful as that little fellow’s dad.

I may never get Earth’s glory; I may never gather gold;

Men may count me as a failure when my business life is told;

But if he who follows after is a Christian, I’ll be glad,

For I know I’ve been successful as a little fellow’s dad. (Author unknown)