

FATHER'S DAY – THE PRODIGAL SON

- Fathers sometimes get a bad rap. Churches sometimes spend Mother's Day bragging on Mom and Father's Day beating up on Dad.
- One small boy said, "Father's Day is just like Mother's Day, only you don't spend as much on the gift." May I speak for fathers everywhere when I say, "What gift?"
- Mark Twain said, "When I was a boy of 14 my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to 21, I was astonished at how much the old man learned in 7 years."
- Comedian Bill Cosby wrote, "Now that my father is a grandfather he just can't wait to give money to my kids. But when I was a kid and I asked him for 50 cents, he would tell me the story of his life. How he got up at 5 a.m. when he was 7 years old and walked 23 miles to milk 90 cows. And the farmer for whom he worked had no bucket, so he had to squirt the milk into his little hand and then walk 8 miles to the nearest can. All for 5 cents. The result was I never got my 50 cents. But now he tells my children every time he comes into the house, 'Well, let's see how much money old Granddad has for his wonderful grandkids.' And the minute they take money out of his hands I call them over to me and I snatch it away from them. Because that is my money!"
- There are sayings we associate with our dads. Here are the top ten Dad quotes from the article "The World According To Fathers" ...
 - What part of "no" don't you understand?
 - This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you.
 - Why? Because I said so!
 - I wasn't asleep; I was just resting my eyes.
 - Shut the door; were you born in a barn?
 - A little dirt never hurt anyone.
 - As long as you live under my roof, you'll live by my rules.
 - I'm not made out of money.
 - Don't make me stop this car!
 - Ask your mother.
- Jewish tradition insists that fatherhood is not necessarily biological. The one who raises a child is considered the true parent. Teachers are like fathers, so much so that their honor takes precedence especially in those situations where the father is only a biological relationship and it is the teacher who provides what a father should provide: guidance, values, discipline, direction and love.
- In the first century, families were presided over by fathers who could do whatever they pleased in their homes. Rome had a law called patria potestas, which meant "the father's power." Men who were Roman citizens were given absolute rights over their families. By law, the children and the wife were regarded as the patriarch's personal property, and he could do with them what he wished. A displeased father could disown his children, sell them into slavery, or even kill them if he wished. When a child was born, the baby was placed between the father's feet. If the father picked up the baby, the child stayed in the home. If he turned and walked away, the child was either left to die or sold at auction. Seneca, a contemporary of the apostle Paul, described Roman policy with regard to unwanted animals: "We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge a knife into a sick cow. Children born weak or deformed we drown." Things are not much better today, are they? Millions of unwanted babies are aborted each year. Children have become a disposable commodity in our society, just as they were in Rome!
- But the Bible calls Christian fathers to a different standard! Our kids are not property to own but image bearers of God who need to be trained. Dads, we are called to provide a proper nurturing environment where our kids can grow up to love and serve the Lord! It was counter-cultural in the first century, and it still is today!
- The New Testament challenges us to see the word "father" as a verb not just a noun. It's biologically easy to become a father, but biblically challenging to actually "father" our children. The Bible very clearly challenges dads to be the spiritual leader in their homes because the ultimate responsibility for what a family becomes belongs to the father. And the primary part of that responsibility is striking a balance between LOVE and DISCIPLINE.
 - **Hebrews 12:7 (LB)** Let God train you, for he is doing what any loving father does for his children. Whoever heard of a son who was never corrected?
 - **1 Thessalonians 2:11 (KJV)** As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,
 - **Ephesians 6:4 (MES)** Fathers, don't exasperate your children by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.
 - **Colossians 3:21 (LB)** Fathers, don't scold your children so much that they become discouraged and quit trying.
- In writing to the Corinthians, Paul compares his role as an apostle to the role filled by a dad. **No one can take the unique place of dad!**

- **1 Cor. 4:15 (KJV)** For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.
- **1 Cor. 4:15 (MES)** There are a lot of people around who can't wait to tell you what you've done wrong, but there aren't many fathers willing to take the time and effort to help you grow up.
- One of the biggest threats to the generation we are now raising is the breakdown of the family. (Canadians, you need to speak up for the family in the way you vote one week from tomorrow! It is your responsibility as a citizen and as a Christian to know how the candidates vote on the issues – and vote accordingly!)
- Lifelong marriages provide the foundation for social order; everything of value rest on those underpinnings. Historically, when the family begins to unravel in any culture, everything else is adversely affected. Canada stands on this precipice today!
- 70% of black babies and 20% of white babies born in North America are born out of wedlock. Most of them will never know their fathers – or a father's love. Only 1/3 of children born in North America will live with both biological parents through age 18. How does this affect us?
 - 85% of children with behavior disorders are from fatherless homes
 - 71% of high school drop outs are from fatherless homes
 - 70% of teen pregnancies are from fatherless homes
 - 80% of rapists are from fatherless homes
 - 75% of teen patients in drug abuse centers are from fatherless homes
 - 70% of juveniles in correctional institutions are from fatherless homes
 - 85% of youths in prison are from fatherless homes
 - 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes
- Thirty years ago, we believed that poverty and racial discrimination were primarily responsible for juvenile crime and behavioral problems. Now, nearly all of the evidence points to family breakup as the real culprit, and predicts a societal catastrophe if we don't turn this trend around! 72% of North Americans say the physical absence of fathers is the most serious problem facing our families.
- How can you buck the trend? By committing your life totally to Christ and raising your family to do the same!
- Christian fathers do not lie, steal, lust and covet! Christian fathers do not serve the god of money! Christian fathers do not sire and then abandon their children! Christian fathers do not cheat on their wives! Christian fathers don't send their kids to church, they take them! Christian fathers have a REAL relationship with God! The greatest need of the hour in Canada is united homes where Christ is exalted!
- Many of you were raised in homes where this was NOT the case, but the Bible has special value for you since it shows us an IDEAL father – God Himself! Here's the Bible's most famous "dad story" ...
- **Luke 15:11-32 (MES)** Then he said, "There was once a man who had two sons. [12] The younger said to his father, 'Father, I want right now what's coming to me.' So the father divided the property between them. [13] It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. [14] After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. [15] He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. [16] He was so hungry he would have eaten the corncobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any. [17] That brought him to his senses. He said, 'All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. [18] I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; [19] I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.' [20] He got right up and went home to his father. When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. [21] The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.' [22] But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. [23] Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! [24] My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!' And they began to have a wonderful time. [25] All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day's work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing. [26] Calling over one of the houseboys, he asked what was going on. [27] He told him, 'Your brother came home. Your father has ordered a feast—barbecued beef!—because he has him home safe and sound.' [28] The older brother stalked off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't listen. [29] The son said, 'Look how many years I've stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? [30] Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!' [31] His father said, 'Son, you don't understand. You're with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours— [32] but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he's alive! He was lost, and he's found!'

- The results of living away from our Heavenly Father's influence are always disastrous, and nothing can prevent the ultimate consequences from catching up with us. The farther away we run, the worse the destruction gets. As exciting as the world appears, the Father's house is the only place where real life and love are experienced. The world is the illusion; the Father's house is reality.
- Some people are surprised that God acts like the father in this story. He does nothing to stop the son from taking advantage of him. He doesn't even try to keep him from leaving home and engaging in behaviors he knows will be destructive to the young man's life. When he asks for the estate to be settled before the father's death — the ultimate insult in that culture — the father just gives it to him!
- Isn't it disturbing that God refuses to step in and stop people from doing what is wrong? He has a non-interference policy. "Why doesn't God do something about the evil in the world? Why doesn't he stop people from hurting other people or doing evil things?" Because God has given us the awesome gift of free will! If he interfered, it would no longer be free will. We think we would like God to be more controlling — that is, when it comes to other people. We would like to have him force them to do the right things and stop them from doing wrong things. But when WE want to rebel we don't want anyone trying to control us. God knows that the moment he forces us to do his will, it is no longer obedience, and therefore it means nothing.
- In the culture of Jesus' day, children did not even leave home when they became adults and married. The father simply added on to the house, especially if his estate was wealthy. To leave home was to leave everything — your family, relationships, work, and future. But the father did not want his son to stay home if the son did not want to stay. He did not want him to be there out of some kind of obligation.
- Notice that the father does not go to the distant country in search of his son. He will not rescue him against his will. He will let him go until he has discovered for himself that the world is a LIE. How ironic that the son's pursuit of pleasure will make pain his constant companion! We can easily see the foolishness of this boy, and the results of his destructive lifestyle before they even come about. But when you are in the middle of that situation, it is not so easy to see, is it?
- The world looks so appealing, and people seem to be so free and having such a good time. You think you are invincible, and you are immune from the destruction that takes place in other people's lives. You are smarter than they are, and those things will never happen to you. But they do happen to you, don't they?
- **Galatians 6:7-8 (LB)** Don't be misled; remember that you can't ignore God and get away with it: a man will always reap just the kind of crop he sows! If he sows to please his own wrong desires, he will be planting seeds of evil and he will surely reap a harvest of spiritual decay and death; but if he plants the good things of the Spirit, he will reap the everlasting life that the Holy Spirit gives him.
- A wise person accepts God's truth and lives their life accordingly. But the foolish person insists on testing God's truth by experience before they will believe it. That is what this young son did.
- This rebellious son was living off of his father's resources the whole time! He would have had to work a lifetime to get that much money! He was squandering his inheritance and throwing away that which had been intended to provide him with a future. The prostitutes and parties were paid for out of his father's pocket. He used the blessings and resources his father provided to rebel against his father!
- **What are you doing with the blessings God has given to you?**
- The worst part of this young man's life is not that he went away to the far country and wasted his inheritance, but that he never developed a relationship with his father. If he had, he would never have left home. He never understood how much his father loved him. He never figured out that what was available to him at home was more than all the pleasure and money in the world. He would not believe that his father wanted the best for him and had great plans for him. He had lived with him all those years and never knew him!
- Did you notice that there is a third character in this story? The elder brother shared a critical character flaw with his younger brother. He stayed around the house all that time, never rebelled or went to a far country – but he never developed a relationship with his father either! He was dutiful and faithful, he worked hard and was dependable – but he did what he did because it made him feel proud of his own accomplishments, rather than out of love for the father. That's why, when the father showed that he still cared for the prodigal son, he became angry and bitter. He didn't understand that it was not about who had been good and who had been bad, it was about who was dead and was now alive. It was not a matter of who was deserving, it was about who was in desperate need. In the older brother's concern for justice, he overlooked his father's concern for grace!
- This parable is really about a DAD, not about a son. If you've made horrible mistakes, taken foolish risks, and basically wasted your life, God loves you in spite of that! This Dad still welcomes sinners home!