

CELEBRATING FATHER'S DAY

2020

“Anyone can be a father, but it takes someone special to be a dad”. What a great quote! It is true that any man can father a child, but it takes someone with special attributes to be a great dad, a ‘hero’ in the eyes of his children. And on this Father’s Day, I want to recognize the dads who contribute in a positive way in the upbringing of their children; who selflessly give of themselves for the well-being of their families. They are dependable and trustworthy men, who by their example become a positive role model for their children. They know the importance of family, good moral values and godly principles in their lives. I thank God for all these dads! I would venture to say they are a rare breed nowadays. On this Father’s Day, I also wish to pay tribute to a very special man in my life; my father who passed away in 1983.

I can only imagine how overwhelming it must have been for our father to raise three young children after the death of our mother. Although we were well taken care of by a maid and then by an aunt, the fact remains that he was the person primarily responsible for our upbringing. As a result of his loss, he clearly struggled to live a normal life. For many years he kept a constant and deep sadness in his heart, which proved to be emotionally hard on all of us. Nonetheless, I keep very fond memories of him.

My father owned a grocery store in the small village where I grew up. He was not a wealthy man financially; quite the opposite, in fact. However, compassion, kindness and generosity co-existed in his heart, making him to my eyes the wealthiest man in the world. In fact, dad was my ‘hero’ while I was growing up! And he will always remain as such in my heart...

I often witnessed his good deeds towards people. However, what impressed me the most was my father’s genuine compassion for the less fortunate. I specifically remember a grumpy old man who lived alone in a small cabin across the street from us. Very often dad would invite him for a meal, and this man would always be critical about the food. I could never understand his lack of appreciation for the free meals he was getting. However, dad never seemed to be bothered by it.

My father was also a hardworking man. He showed us the importance of having great work ethics in everything we did. He may not have been a loquacious man, but I learned a lot just by watching him. His actions said it all.

In spite of his depressive mood, he never abandoned his faith in God. The death of my younger brother at the age of twenty-four to a two-year battle with cancer, was another difficult trial for my father. However, following a conversation he had with my brother before his death, dad’s outlook on life changed drastically. A deep feeling of serenity replaced the overwhelming sadness that had held him captive for twenty-five years. What a joy it was to finally have a father who enjoyed his children, grand-children, and embraced life again!

On this Father’s Day, I also thought of asking my husband to answer a few questions regarding his own experience as a father. Now being in his golden years, I am sure he can better reflect on his life thus far and, therefore, be able to share his personal experiences and perspective on it. I presume his answers will also help our own sons to know him better as a father, as well as a man.

Q. What principles did your father pass on to you that you passed on to your children?

A. Interesting question! While my father did not exactly teach me and my siblings good principles through lectures, he did it through the way he lived. What perhaps impressed me the most about my dad was his dedication to accomplish whatever he set his mind to, and in the best way he could. He had strong work ethics, whether at work or at home. I remember helping him install 'scotch heaters' on furnace systems and, as in any other tasks, he always made sure he did things properly, and the best he could.

He did, at times, affirm principles that have always stayed with me. For example, as a teenager, he said to me it was important to choose my friends and people I kept company with. As he said, people can simply tell who we are by watching who we associate with. These two characteristics have always stayed with me. I hope that my sons have learned the same from how I lived, as well as the words and thoughts I shared with them as they were growing up.

Q. What mistake taught you the most about life?

A. I believe the greatest mistake I've ever made was to overestimate my abilities for success in business, preferring to take risks by simply believing that I could do it.

In spite of the fact that my motivation might have been right, my decision to move to North Florida in 1990 was made without much planning on my part. I hadn't made any serious study before opening a new business in a new environment. I did not even seek God's guidance, and I imposed my own decision on my family. It had been done emotionally, and what resulted from it was to be expected. I lost all I had and more. I went through a bankruptcy, and found myself without any source of income. My wife and children felt the financial pressure as well. It took me two years to find work in a domain I was knowledgeable in, as well as about eight more years to get back on my feet financially.

The most important lesson I've learned from this is that now I would never even think of making plans or changes in my life without first, asking God for guidance and wisdom. Furthermore, I learned that in life, it doesn't matter what role we play in the family; we must always remember that all our actions and decisions will have an impact on everyone. It is then of utmost importance to respect each other and be in agreement before making any major decisions.

Q. Do you think today's fathers have things harder or easier than you had them?

A. In my opinion, fatherhood has basically never changed or evolved. So it was for my great-grandfather and grandfather, my own father and me as well. The only difference rests in the world we live in. A father must be a leader in his family, a provider (food, clothing, shelter, etc.), and also be an example for his children. A very important element to remember is that the father is, first of all, a husband; and the way he treats his wife is, by itself, a daily teaching to his children.

Fathers today are still responsible to have and to live by a sound value system if they want to convey good moral leadership to their children. Honesty and integrity are part of it. Our environment or era we live in should have no bearing on what is our true responsibility as fathers. Ultimately though, we're the ones who choose either the right or the wrong attitudes.

Q. What are the three happiest moments in your life so far?

A. I will list them in two categories: chronologically and by order of importance. Chronologically,

first, it was the day my beloved wife-to-be told me that she loved me and popped a kiss on me! In fact, I was surprised, especially after she had rejected my feelings of love for her for a couple of years.

Next, it was the birth of my three sons which produced in me much adrenaline as I raced to the hospital, and to finally see them breathe for the first time. I also had the experience to see three births from three different perspectives. What I mean here is the first one being a normal birth, the second one a breach, and the third one a C-section; it sort of left imprints on my heart as to their uniqueness in their personalities as well.

Lastly, it was the day I surrendered my life to God through Jesus-Christ. That famous day will follow me right through eternity!

Now, in order of importance, I must say that first, is when I decided to follow Christ as Savior and Lord. Then, it's my wedding to the love of my life. Lastly, the birth of my sons. Why do I put Christ first? Simply because I couldn't love them as much as I do now without the love of God and Christ in my heart. I can love them with what I call, a supernatural kind of love; a love that goes way beyond what the world knows.

Q. Do you have any practical advice or words of wisdom to give to your sons or fathers in general?

A. As we often hear, hindsight is 20/20. Yet, even after decades of fatherhood, there may be things we don't even know we might have done wrong. What I mean by that is that each child, each person is different; perceives, reacts and understands life differently than us; and it goes both ways. This being said, there is for me one very important principle that I've learned. It's simply to love each child for who they are, what their hopes and dreams are. We have to finally realize that they are unique individuals, just as we are.

As fathers, we must have rules and principles that we teach our children with their best interests at heart. Those must be based on solid ground, the Word of God, so that we provide them with a strong spiritual knowledge of God. As they grow up, it will guide them to become what our Creator meant for them and for all of us to be. However, this is not an army squadron, but young minds that seek to learn and understand. While we may claim to know better from our life experiences, as fathers it is a complicated mission to put ourselves at their level to be able to teach and encourage them. This does not mean that discipline is not enforced. However, it must be positive, meant to correct and encourage our children to grow, and to become responsible godly men and women.

I also understand the primary role and priorities of a father are first, to love God with all his heart, to be the responsible leader of his family, to love and respect his wife, to love his children as well as to provide for all their needs.

I am very grateful to my husband for sharing his personal experiences and perspective on fatherhood. As he mentioned in one of his answers, I agree that our financial problems were a direct result of poor planning before the decision was made to move to North Florida. However, we cannot only focus on the negative outcome. I believe we have learned valuable lessons as a result of these difficult times. Furthermore, we also experienced the faithfulness and the compassion of God in action touching our lives in so many ways. As our heavenly Father, He provided for our needs through what I call, 'little miracles'. However, our faith may have been

shaky at times; we may have experienced moments of despair. Nevertheless, in the middle of it all God was always with us, and with His help we ultimately pulled through. Our heavenly Father is truly the perfect example of a loving father who only wishes what's best for his children.

As my father's life and my husband's testimony prove it, all fathers will eventually be leaving imprints on their children's hearts for years to come; may they be positive or negative. Consequently, the role you are now playing in their lives is crucial. The time and efforts you are presently investing in their upbringing are priceless. You may not see the immediate results or rewards, but they will come. Proverbs 22:6 says..."Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." All I can say to you is be patient, and keep up the good work!

On this Father's Day, my heart especially goes out to my sons; three loving dads who selflessly devote themselves for the well-being of their families. May God bless you, as well as all the dedicated fathers who assume the responsibility of raising a family. I pray for wisdom, patience, and determination needed to carry out your mission.

I believe that giving recognition to the fathers who have finished raising their families is likewise well deserved, especially on Father's Day. You have invested much time and effort in your children's lives for many years, and you most probably appreciate this season in your lives. No matter how each of you reacted to this change, your children will always be in your hearts. Once a father, always a father... Some of you may already be grandfathers, playing a positive and important role in the lives of your grandchildren. May the love and affection shown you on this special day by your children and grandchildren bless you richly, as you have blessed them over the years.

I expect Father's Day to be especially difficult for fathers who have lost a child, for those fathers who for some reason cannot be with their families, and lastly for the fatherless children; being young or old. My heartfelt compassion goes out to all of you, and I pray that God will fill your hearts, minds, and souls with His amazing peace. May you find comfort in the support and love of family and friends.

**To all the fathers...
HAVE A WONDERFUL FATHER'S DAY!**

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