

PERSPECTIVE

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IN DEFENSE OF FATHERHOOD

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IN DEFENSE OF FATHERHOOD



Fatherhood. A single, ten-letter word that, as we read it, can send our minds in a thousand different directions. A smile might come to your face as you think about your father. A tear might well up in your eye as you think about a father who is no longer living. Perhaps, thinking about your father stirs up anger or even fear. Maybe you are like me, and don't have many memories of your father. When I was a young child, my father wasn't around much. My parents divorced when I was 12, and my father died when I was 20. By God's grace, when I read "fatherhood" today, I think of something totally different than I did years ago.

If you are reading this article, it is fairly safe to say you are interested in the subject of fatherhood. My prayer is that this article will be encouraging and instructive to all readers, not just fathers. It is often said that our experience with our earthly fathers has a material influence on our view of God, our heavenly Father. If there is a shred of truth in that statement, as Christians, we want to live in such a way as to make God, our Heavenly Father, seem glorious. Many of us grew up with fathers who thought providing financially and being faithful to their wives was the standard. Others thought the role of a dad was to prepare their children to earn an athletic or academic scholarship to college. In reality, Christian fatherhood is more than this. Christian fathers provide for their family and evangelize and disciple their children, all while modeling the Christian life.

CULTURE AND FATHERHOOD

Popular culture is at constant war with the biblical worldview across a broad spectrum of issues. From gender to marriage to discipline to athletics to entertainment, the prevailing sentiment of the culture is in stark contrast to how Christians understand how we should live. We would be naïve to think that the roles and responsibilities of fathers would be treated any differently.

In recent years, the image of fathers in the media has changed. A generation ago, families were watching television shows like *Father Knows Best*. While not a Christian show, Jim Anderson, the father, was portrayed as a wise man who provided sage advice to his children. He was a loving husband who was willing to sacrifice his personal desires for the sake of his family. Jim's character was held in high regard and esteemed by his family. In the 80s and 90s, we began to see a subtle shift in the way fathers were portrayed on television. One of the most "popular" TV dads was Al Bundy from *Married with Children*. Bundy is positively portrayed as a hard-working, blue-collar man who does what is needed to provide for his family. While his work ethic is to be applauded, his conversations with his wife and children are riddled with sarcasm, and he seems to be more concerned with his former high school athletic glory than anything else.

The culmination of the cultural decline of fatherhood is represented in Homer Simpson from *The Simpsons*. The success and popularity of *The Simpsons* is literally unmatched. Not only is it the longest-running animated series in TV history, but it is also the longest-running scripted primetime television series ever! Regrettably, millions of Americans have been conditioned to think that Homer Simpson is the model for the American dad. According to Wikipedia, Homer is, “overweight, immature, outspoken, aggressive, lazy, ignorant, unprofessional, and deeply fond of beer, junk food, and television.” Art reflects the culture of the day, and when USA Today recognized Homer Simpson as one of the “top 25 most influential people of the last 25 years,” the public perception of fatherhood reached an all-time low.

We have come a long way from the “traditional” view of fatherhood. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), “the modern-day father comes in various forms. Today’s father is no longer always the traditional married breadwinner and disciplinarian in the family. He can be single or married; externally employed or stay-at-home; gay or straight.” I would even go so far as to say that some even believe fathers aren’t necessary. Women can become pregnant through artificial insemination and give birth to a child without ever knowing who the “father” of the child is.

So, how do we as Christians think about fatherhood and swim against the tide of popular culture? We need to take heed of Paul’s words in Romans 12:2, “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Where do we go to discern the will of God? Let’s turn to His Word to see what the Bible says about fatherhood.

THE BIBLE AND FATHERHOOD

Throughout Scripture, the role of a shepherd is used as a helpful metaphor in discussing leadership. We see this particularly pronounced in John 10. In John 10:11, Jesus declares, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.” Knowing that Jesus is the perfect model for the Christian life, in what ways can we use the role of a shepherd as a model for fatherhood? I’d like to highlight four ways the role of fathers is shaped by Scripture. Biblical fathers should lead, provide, instruct, and protect their children in such a way as to make our heavenly Father seem glorious.

Fathers Lead

In Lewis Carroll’s classic, *Alice in Wonderland*, the Cheshire Cat tells Alice, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.” Without a goal in mind, any route can lead to an unknown destination. In leading our children, fathers should be clear and concise about the direction of the family. One of the first things good leaders do is cast a vision and declare intent; set a course. In Joshua 24:15, we see a great example of this. Joshua clearly communicates, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua identifies his desired destination for his family. It is safe to assume that Joshua didn’t know all of the details about what the remainder of his life would look like when he made this declaration. But he was planting a flag in the ground that would guide the leadership of his family.

Leading well is more than just setting the direction for a desired destination. We cannot effectively shepherd and lead our children without knowing them. While I’ve never literally tended a flock of sheep, I’m quite sure the shepherd knows which ones in the flock are prone to wander and which ones will be more inclined to follow. Anyone who has been around children knows they are all different. Some are compliant, some are stubborn. Some are impulsive, some are measured. Some like to run out front, some stay in the flock. Fathers must invest the time to get to know their children. What are their fears? Where are they prone to be tempted to sin? Dad, you can’t expect to lead your children well if you don’t know them.

Fathers Provide

The Bible calls fathers to provide for their children. Paul is quite clear in 1 Timothy 5:8. A father is to “provide for his relatives, especially the members of his household.” It is important to understand what Paul means when he says “provide.” It does not seem that Paul is saying fathers need to provide a new car for their 16-year-old child. Or that every child in the house gets their own bedroom. Or that they will be clothed in the latest fashion trends. We live in a world that wants to define “provision” as having everything you want, more so than having what you need. That is simply not true.

As a word of caution, I want to warn fathers against falling into the trap of excessive provision. If you are someone who is tempted to be proud of the material provision in your life, let me remind you that your

identity is not in the size of your child's closet, the car they drive, or the number of home runs they hit in Little League. If this is you, take heed the words of Mark 8:36, "for what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" I also want to encourage brothers who might fall on the other end of the spectrum. If you find you are in a season struggling to make ends meet, rest in the words of Paul to the Philippians in 4:19: "my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Fathers Instruct

When we think about a father's responsibility to instruct his children, few verses are clearer than Ephesians 6:4: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." There is no doubt that an entire article could be written on this one verse. But, given the task at hand, I want to highlight two takeaways here. First, the phrase "bring them up" conveys something of tenderness and gentleness. Especially with younger children, fathers should be tender and gentle. Being tender and gentle does not mean that fathers should concede their authority to their children. No, the point here is that harshness can lead to exasperation and anger. It is critical that fathers learn how to exercise their authority over their children with a gentle hand and a subtle touch.

The second takeaway relates to "the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Here we think about discipline or training like that of Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." Train up a child in what? In the instruction of the Lord. This means instructing them in the ways of God, his commands, and in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This means integrating the instruction into your daily life, keeping with Deuteronomy 6:7-9: "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." If this seems like a big task, it is! We are essentially talking about the constant need to watch the flock at all times, continually looking for ways to point them to the Good Shepherd.

Fathers Protect

Like shepherds, fathers are called to protect their children. In Psalm 23:4, David writes about the Lord as his Good Shepherd: "Even though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me." In the midst of what should be a scary place, David is not afraid because the Shepherd has his rod to provide protection. Fathers are called to provide physical protection for their children.

The expectation to protect our children's physical safety is quite obvious, but what might not be as obvious is their virtual or emotional protection. We live in a digital age filled with dangers that few of us reading this had to navigate in childhood. Today's children are physically safer than ever, yet rates of teenage depression are at an all-time high. Protecting your child in a virtual or emotional way probably looks like restricting or preventing your child from even having a digital footprint until they are in high school. Ensuring your child has the emotional maturity to handle the immense peer pressure from social media is vitally important. I promise that preserving the boundaries of social media use in your home will test your resolve as a parent, but the stakes are too high not to be vigilant in this area.

We also see in verse 4 that the shepherd has a staff. We are to use the staff as a tool to protect our children's spiritual well-being. Fathers are called to use gentle correction to bring our children back if they begin to wander. We are warned in 1 Peter 5:8 that "our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." In today's culture, that lion can take on many forms. Materialism, relativism, and expressive individualism are just a few of the ways Satan can lure our children. Fathers, we need to be on guard, watching over our precious sheep, and be willing to use the staff to bring them back to ensure their spiritual protection.

In thinking about these four roles for fathers, let me reiterate that this list is not exhaustive. Time and space did not permit me to even really address fathers of adult children. Whether you are a man who longs to be a father, a new dad, or a man with older children who wants to do these things better, let me encourage you with a few short points of application.

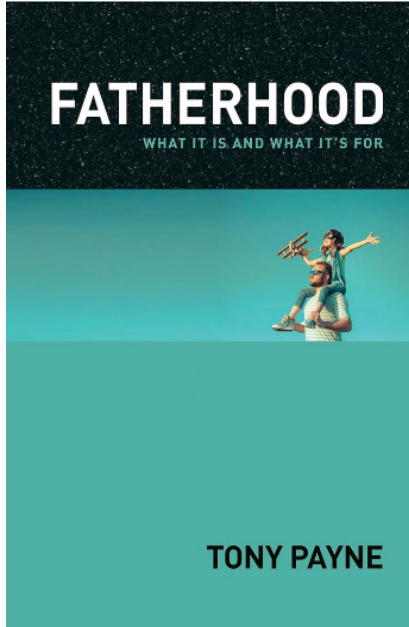
- First, pray. Ask the Lord to provide children if it is his will and to fill you with wisdom and the fruit of the Spirit to lead, provide, instruct, and protect your children well.
- Second, love your wife well. Your relationship with your wife is the most important human relationship you have. If you can model what it looks like to love and care for your wife well, your children will be blessed beyond measure.
- Third, if you don't have another brother in your life who can help you think about these things, seek one out. Scripture exhorts us that there is wisdom in a multitude of godly counselors. In addition to the Bible, there are many great books for fathers seeking to lead their families well. I have personally been helped by *The Shepherd Leader at Home* by Timothy Witmer.
- Lastly, praise God that he is the perfect Father. His leadership, provision, instruction, and protection are perfect. And though we strive to emulate his example, we will inevitably fall short. And when we forsake a gentle spirit and respond in anger, or when we neglect the spiritual well-being of a child, Jesus is quick to forgive those who turn to him in repentance and faith.

Fatherhood is a weighty responsibility. The tide of modern culture is pulling fathers away from a biblical model of what it looks like to be a God-honoring dad. While the battle is tough, there are few greater callings that men have in Scripture. So, we are confronted with a choice. Will we give way to the temptation to swim with the current, or will we fight for what Scripture calls us to? I'll stand with Joshua and declare, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Will you join me?

– Garry Hill

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

FATHERHOOD: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT'S FOR



Written by Tony Payne | Recommended by Reggie Claus

At a time when our culture is losing its understanding of the role of a father and diminishing its significance, Tony Payne's book, *Fatherhood: What It Is And What It's For*, provides a biblical portrait of fatherhood. Payne emphasizes that, "the perfect model of the fatherliness that we long for is found in the portrait of our Heavenly Father, sketched in bold clear strokes across the pages of the Bible."

The book is divided into two sections that seek to answer two basic questions. First, "What is fatherhood?" And second, "What's it all for?" The first section builds the biblical case for the significance and role of fathers. The second is devoted to providing a picture of God's purpose for fatherhood—what it's for, what a father should do, and how the gospel changes the purpose of being a father.

While presenting the biblical portrait of fatherhood is the primary focus of the book, Payne also explores practical aspects. These include: expressing authority in love, making good decisions, taking initiative, teaching, prioritizing being a disciple of Christ, praying, contending with

the challenges when children do not follow Christ, and discipling the family. He tackles the inherent tensions in biblical fatherhood—embracing authority and respect without tyranny and abuse, and leading with love and kindness without weakness or neglect. And, he also helpfully calls for fathers to be disciples of Christ first, recognizing the delicate balance of not making an idol of the family while also being a fully committed, responsible, and loving father.

This book will be helpful for anyone looking to explore the biblical basis for fatherhood and the role of a father. It will especially be encouraging and helpful for fathers. Throughout, Payne reveals the unique role and opportunities of a father and the powerful influence of a man who humbly submits to Christ and, through that submission, is led to pursue the well-being of his wife and children. Because the book provides such a compelling counterpoint to today's cultural beliefs about fatherhood and recognizes fatherhood as part of God's design that is transformed by the Gospel, it would also be a helpful resource to share and discuss with a non-believer.

BOOK EXCERPTS

Remember, a father's authority is given to him for one overriding purpose: so that he can pursue the wellbeing of his family. Since he is ultimately responsible and accountable for his family, he needs the power to fulfill this responsibility. The decisions he makes, and the initiatives he undertakes, will be directed to this end. What this means is that fathers will keep sacrificing their own interests and desires for the sake of their families.

– "Practical Authority" p. 63

At a time when no-one is too sure what father is any more, this is a picture of fatherhood that our society desperately needs. It's a picture that reflects the kind of fatherhood we see in God— the mighty life-giver, the loving ruler, the faithful provider. And one of the beauties of this picture is that it avoids the twin traps that have always bedeviled fathers—of self-centered oppressiveness on the one hand, and sentimental ineffectiveness on the other.

– "Why bother?" p. 95

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

BETWEEN US GUYS: LIFE-CHANGING CONVERSATIONS FOR DADS AND SONS

JOEL FITZPATRICK

Written by Joel Fitzpatrick | Recommended by Will Davis



Joel Fitzpatrick's book *Between Us Guys: Life-Changing Conversations for Dads and Sons* invites readers, especially dads of sons, to think biblically about what it means to raise a son in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. In each chapter, he lays out a framework for having gospel-centered conversations with your son regarding topics like biblical friendship, leisure, love, generosity, disappointment, money, and sex. Fitzpatrick explains God's good intention for each topic, how sin distorts God's good intention, how the Gospel transforms our view, and, finally, how we should live in light of the gospel when it comes to the topic at hand. The book is written in a way that is conversational, where dads can simply read the chapters to their sons and use the helpful questions provided to spark conversation. Dads can also pick certain chapters to discuss depending on the age of their child.

Fitzpatrick does a wonderful job of making each topic accessible to the reader, regardless of the reader's level of spiritual maturity. He uses real-word examples that are relatable to most everyone to explain God's good intention for what can be hard to discuss topics like friendship, failure, and love. I was especially helped by the chapter on "Failure and Perfection," where Fitzpatrick asks, "If you were given a really good gift by someone, even when you deserve the opposite, would you want to punch the gift giver in the face? Of course not, you'd want to go around telling everyone about the generosity of the gift giver." He goes on to say that, when you are freed from the pressure of being perfect because you have been given the gift of Jesus' perfection, it should make you want to tell everyone about that amazing gift!

There are certainly many good books written on parenting and having gospel centered conversations with young sons. I'd recommend this book to any man who has young boys in their life. It can be a helpful tool for starting gospel-centered conversations with those young boys while helping both the adult and child think biblically about these good, God given things that sin corrupts. Reading this book is a great reminder that, by God's grace, and through the power of the Spirit, we can honor God in how we relate to and live in a world corrupted by sin but redeemed by Christ.

BOOK EXCERPTS

Whether your son is older or younger, it is never too early or too late to start talking about what it means to be a man who loves God and his neighbor.

– "Introduction: Being a Man" p. 1

Jesus has made us into new people—people who do not serve their money, but instead use their money to serve other people.

– "Chapter 10: Money" p. 73

BIBLE READING PLAN

JUNE

TAKE UP & READ

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message.
Take Up & Read!

June 1	Haggai 2:10–23	June 17	Psalm 84
June 2	Psalm 37	June 18	Exodus 15
June 3	Psalm 36	June 19	Isaiah 41
June 4	Romans 12:9–21	June 20	2 Thess. 1:1–12
June 5	Jeremiah 12	June 21	Psalm 46
June 6	Matthew 5:1–16	June 22	Psalm 83
June 7	Proverbs 24	June 23	Psalm 104
June 8	Psalm 37	June 24	Psalm 105
June 9	Psalm 56	June 25	Genesis 1
June 10	Psalm 55	June 26	Genesis 2
June 11	Isaiah 41	June 27	Colossians 1:9–23
June 12	1 Samuel 21	June 28	Job 38
June 13	Matthew 10:16–33	June 29	Psalm 104
June 14	Romans 8	June 30	Psalm 128
June 15	Psalm 56		
June 16	Psalm 83		

*Sermons in Bold

NEW MEMBERS



ISAAC & SAVANNAH
ANDERSON



WADE CURTIS



MADI HOPPE



TIMOTHY KIM



WADE & FAITH
LINDSEY



ISABELLA SALAS

"We must grasp once again, the idea of church membership as being
the membership of the body of Christ and as the biggest honour
which can come a man's way in this world."

MARTIN LLYOD-JONES



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