

Have You Seen Father?

Father's Day 6-19-11

My father was a good man: industrious, a good provider, responsible, a good steward, and honest. He was a church elder and made me go to church every Sunday even when I didn't want to. But my father also worked a lot, including after dinner, and so was often not home. It was a big deal when I got to actually do something together with my dad. I loved those special times. Later, I learned that a lot of dads were not so good and some kids didn't want to be around their fathers—but that sort of thing wasn't talked about much in older generations. Today, family brokenness is front page news. What was your dad like?

In the Bible, the identity of people was so closely bound to their fathers that children were named after their immediate fathers. Joshua *Son of Nur*, David *Son of Jesse*, Simon *bar (Son of) Jonah* are a few examples. Even Jesus was identified by his adoptive father's lineage in Matthew's gospel. Looking closer at this custom, we find no continuous last names. Rather, children's names changed from generation to generation corresponding to their immediate father—the one with the most direct influence on their lives in the patriarchal culture of Israel.

Certainly mothers had important influence also. Think of Rebekka's influence on Jacob or Mary's spiritual heart toward her miraculous son, Jesus, to name but two. Scripture makes it clear God views mankind primarily through the lens of man and woman working together. In heaven, Paul wrote, there is neither male nor female at all.

To better understand the role God expects of fathers, it is insightful to consider the commandment Jesus said was most important: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (*Matt 22:37*). He was directly quoting *Deuteronomy 6:5*, which is preceded by the most famous prayer of all Israel, even to this day, called the "*Shema*" (pronounced "shmah"), based on *Deut. 6:4*: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!"

The same scripture continues: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." (v. 6-7). In other words, the most important commandment quoted by Jesus had a mandate to be passed on to children, whether sitting at home or walking along the way.

These passages portray three essential characteristics of Godly fathers. **First, fathers are defined by reproducing themselves—not just physically, but reproducing in their children their Godly identity.** The most important commandment is not just about words, but about having consistent behavior, a living demonstration of what is most important in the father's life. Not just talking, but walking it out together in our households.

Second, fathers need to become one, as the Lord is "One"! They need to live, talk and walk in integrity. This means being the same person wherever you are, not just acting one way at church and another at home or on the job. God calls men to be whole, just as He is whole, even though He is known by many characteristics, including, most importantly, His triune nature.

Third, fathers are called to walk in God's authority rather than their own power. This word "authority" comes from an ancient word meaning to "increase." Fathers, by nature, are called to bring about increase for their households. Biblically speaking, the blessing of increase is dependent upon the Lord, our ultimate Provider and Sustainer. The catch is this: authority comes from consistently living, speaking and demonstrating with integrity the power of God in our lives. Ultimately, authority is recognized by its fruit of increase, not by the demands it places on others. Too often, men co-mingle Godly authority with self-righteousness rather than walking out God's commandments with integrity, which brings the truest blessing of God's increase.

Jesus said His followers would be known by their love. When fathers are known to their wives and children by their consistent love and integrity, they gain all the authority and honor they ever need, and God is glorified.