

Happy Father's Day

Mike Ford (1955-2021)

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Since tomorrow is Father's Day, I thought I would talk a bit about fathers. I have mentioned more than once that Satan has inspired a desire in the world to turn our boys into girls. This has been going on for decades, and now many of those boys are men. And maybe they are not sure if they should follow the example of their own fathers, or the image crafted by the media of what a man should be. Maybe they did not have fathers in the house to show them the way, good or bad.

Television sitcoms and movies often paint fathers as inept, bumbling, and dominated by their wives. Or, if the character is a strong male, they are portrayed as uncaring, unemotional, and incapable of affection. These things are unfortunate, because that is not what God had in mind when He created Adam. Ideally, fathers love and respect their wives and lead the family in following God. But we live in a time when fathers are seen as extraneous—sperm donors at best.

Once upon a time, there was something called a “shotgun marriage.” If an unmarried couple found themselves pregnant, the man did the “right” thing and married the mother of his child. I'm not saying this was always right, but at least the child conceived would be born with a father. But now, as I said, a father is just so much excess baggage.

I have had the discussion with friends about whether a bad father is worse than no father at all. When I say “bad” father, I do not mean physically abusive and the kind that belongs in jail, but maybe he is just not Andy of Mayberry. My take is that a poor father is better than no father. At least a poor father can grow into the position; he can learn and improve, God-willing, and a child can decide later on if that is an example to be followed or not. But no father at all is a vacuum that is hard for a mother to fill.

I am sure you all know who Elon Musk is—the Tesla car guy. He and his girlfriend, the Canadian pop singer Claire Elise Boucher, stage name Grimes, just had a new baby. Grimes (I cannot believe I am even calling her that) wants to let the child determine its own gender identity as it grows up, and Elon, being a New Age male, said, "OK!" This is called treating the baby as a gender-neutral “theyby.” The child has male sex organs and Elon says (to his credit) “it's a dude.” They named it “X AE A-12.” The AE together is called a diphthong. There are several jokes available to me here but I will pass. It is just too easy. I ask myself, “How does this man have a billion dollars and I don’t?”

I read this story and had to wonder about Elon’s father. So I did some research, and I found that his father is Errol Musk. He is South African. Elon and Errol have not spoken to each other in a long time; it is a strained relationship. Elon says he had a miserable childhood. His parents divorced when he was 10, and at some point he moved in with his dad. He says his dad is a “terrible human being” and “evil.” His dad did remarry, and with that marriage came a 4-year old step-daughter, Jana. Errol was 44 at the time; a 40 year age difference. Fast-forward to 2017, and Errol fathered a child with Jana, his now 30-year old step-daughter.

So, yes, I would agree that Elon has legitimate issues with his father. Errol, to his credit, refuses to respond to Elon’s comments, and tells the press he is not going to fight back. About all he will say is that Elon is “having a tantrum, like a spoilt child” and “needs to get over himself.” So this is not an Andy of Mayberry father. He is maybe more like King David in some respects. But as bad a father as Errol might have been, I argue that it would have been worse to have no father at all. Elon admits that he got his engineering skills from his father.

In 1970, 3% of births to white mothers and 24% of births to black mothers were out of wedlock. In 1990, that number had grown to 18% of white births and 64% of black births. It was 34% in the Hispanic community.

By 2016, the number was 28% for whites, 52% for Hispanics, and 69% of all black births are out of wedlock.

The consequences of fatherlessness means that children in father-absent homes are 4 times more likely to be poor. They will have significantly higher drug use. They will tend to be more violent, have lower grades, and commit suicide more. These are horrible statistics. Fathers are a necessary part of God's plan for the family. Yes, a family can survive without a father, but it is certainly not easy. I am not advocating that a woman stay in an abusive relationship, nor am I diminishing the efforts of single mothers. I am simply pointing out that men have a responsibility to be men in every sense of the word: godly fathers and husbands, taking responsibility for their actions.

Mother's Day goes all the way back to the 1860s, and rightly so. Mothers are the glue that holds a family together. We are lost without them. They civilize society. Fathers sometimes get lost in the shuffle. I read an article just this morning that fathers sometimes feel like a fifth wheel. They sometimes miss dinner or special occasions because they are taking care of the family. But their presence should nonetheless be felt.

Father's Day is relatively recent, established as a formal holiday in the U.S. in 1972. But I think it is entirely appropriate to have a day set aside to acknowledge fathers. And for those who grew up without a father in the home, you can certainly pay tribute to those who helped fill the void, be they uncles, grandfathers, older brothers, employers, and so on. Hopefully you have someone in your life that was helpful in that regard. So, ideally, Father's Day is a time to recognize fathers and father figures and their contributions to their families and beyond.

There is a good article put out by a non-profit group called The Fatherhood Project titled, "A Father's Impact on Child Development." They list, among other things, 10 facts about fathers who are engaged in the rearing of their children. Here are several:

- » Fathers and infants can be equally as attached as mothers and infants when both parents are involved with the child from the beginning of life. (I found that very interesting.)

- » Father involvement using authoritative parenting (which they define as "loving with clear boundaries and expectations") leads to better emotional, academic, social and behavioral outcomes for

children. (This one surprised me. Not that I do not agree; I do. It's just that I did not expect anyone writing today to mention that fathers are necessary for discipline. Of course, they do not call it discipline; they call it "authoritative" parenting. I would point you to Proverbs 3:11-12.)

» High levels of father involvement are correlated with higher levels of sociability, confidence, and self-control in children.

» Children who feel a closeness to their father are twice as likely as those who do not to enter college or find stable employment after high school. Listen to this: They are 80% less likely to spend time in jail.

I am preaching to the choir here, I know. We all understand the importance of fathers. But we are seeing a concerted effort in this world to push fathers aside: "Marriage is a quaint tradition, no longer necessary [unless you're gay]"; "Abortion is birth control;" "Women can do it all and don't need men around. And if a man is around, he should be more like a woman."

Is this really what God intended?

Solomon was given great wisdom by God. He was able to look at his own father, King David, and recognize that maybe he was not "father of the year." He made a lot of mistakes as a father, but I am sure Solomon loved him and was still able to figure out the role of a father. I have no doubt that Solomon would not have been the man and king he was if he had grown up without David in his life at all.

I get so tired of reading about famous people talking about how miserable their childhoods were because their dad never hugged them or was uncommunicative. It seems that Solomon took the good and discarded the bad in his relationship with David, and did not waste time moaning, "Oh, my dad yelled at me."

The book of Proverbs is full of references to fathers and their teachings:

Proverbs 23:22 Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old.

Let me cherry pick through Proverbs 4:

Proverbs 4:1-5 (*Good News Translation*) My children, listen to what your father teaches you. Pay attention, and you will have understanding. For I give you good doctrine; do not forsake my law. When I was my father's [David's] son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, he also taught me, and said to me; let your heart retain my words; keep my commands and live. Get wisdom! Get understanding!

Proverbs 4:10-11 (*Good News Translation*) Hear, my son, and receive my sayings. And the years of your life will be many. I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths.

It says, "I have led you in right paths." Sometimes we think of King David, and all we think about are his sins, his shortcomings, his failings. But Solomon says in verse 4 that his father "taught him" and told him to "keep my commands." Maybe David did not spend enough time with his kids; he did not seem to discipline them. But it is easy for us to cast stones at him from this distance of time. I do not think any of us would want our life story printed in the world's most read book, with all of our weaknesses exposed for everyone to see. But for all David's foibles, Solomon learned from him. Solomon benefited greatly from having his father in his life.

Proverbs 4:20-22 (*Good News Translation*) My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings, do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.