

TITLE: "Our Father and our father"

TEXT: Matthew 7:9-11 (NT p. 7)

This is my translation from the Greek, which is more gender-accurate than our pew Bible translation: Jesus says: "Which of you men, if your son asks for a loaf of bread will give him a stone? Or also, if he asks for a fish will give him a snake? If therefore you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in the heavens give good gifts to those who ask?"

Introduction – Imperfect Dads

This article is titled "Why Men Are Happier." The author did not give her name, perhaps afraid her husband would see it.

The garage is all yours.

Wedding plans take care of themselves.

Chocolate is just another snack.

You can never get pregnant.

Car mechanics tell you the truth.

Wrinkles add character.

Wedding dress \$5,000. Tux rental \$100.

A five-day vacation requires only one suitcase.

Three pairs of shoes are more than enough.

You are unable to see wrinkles in your clothes.

The same hairstyle lasts for years, maybe decades.

You can play with toys all your life.

No wonder men are happier!

I don't know if men ARE happier than women, but this morning I want to share a few things I have learned on my pilgrimage as a dad.

1. Think like a kid

The first thing is to continue to look at things from a child's perspective. This came by email ages ago. It's called "Big Mud Puddles and Sunny Yellow Dandelions." The author is unknown ("Father's Day")

When I look at a patch of dandelions, I see a bunch of weeds trying to take over my yard. ...My kids see flowers for Mom and blowing white fluff you can wish on.

When I look at an old street person and he smiles at me, I see a smelly, dirty person who probably wants money and I look away. ...My kids see someone smiling at them and they smile back.

When I hear music I love, I know I can't carry a tune and don't have much rhythm so I sit self-consciously and listen. ...My kids feel the beat of the music and move to it. They sing out the words. If they don't know them, they make up their own.

When I feel wind on my face, I brace myself against it. I feel it messing up my hair and pulling me back as I walk. ...My kids close their eyes, spread their arms and fly with it, until they fall to the ground laughing.

When I pray, I say thee and thou and grant me this, give me that. ...My kids say, "Hi God! Thanks for my toys and my friends. Please keep bad dreams away tonight. Sorry, I don't want to go to heaven yet. I would miss Mommy and Daddy."

When I see a mud puddle I step around it. I see muddy shoes and dirty carpets. My kids sit in it. ...They see dams to build, rivers to cross and worms to play with.

I wonder if we are given kids to teach or learn from? No wonder God loves little children! Enjoy the little things in life, for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things. ...I wish you Big Mud Puddles and Sunny yellow Dandelions!!!

The best smell in the world, to me, is a privet hedge in bloom. We have one in our yard right now and the smell sends me back to when I was 5 years old. Someone told me that if you caught honey bees in a jar they would make honey. I had never had honey but I knew it was sweet and I wanted to try it. So my friend Teddy and I took our glass jars with holes punched in the metal tops with a nail and headed for the privet hedges that bordered a lot of yards in our neighborhood.

I guess I was not overly bright as a kid. One of my uncles told me that if I put salt on a swallow's tail it would stop and I could catch it. It certainly kept me out of the grownup's hair at family gatherings and it did wear me out, which was probably all for the good for a hyperactive child, but it took me quite a while to catch on.

It took quite a while to catch on about the bees, too. But before I did, Teddy and I spend many blissful hours catching bees, smelling the sweet tang of the privet blossoms and imagining what we would do with all the honey our bees would make. I don't know what my neighbors have thought the past week when they saw me burying my face in the privet blossoms in our yard, but it was sure worth it.

No matter how old you are, if you want to let go of your responsibilities for a while and recapture the joy of life, try thinking like a kid again.

2. Dads may want to adjust their behavior

In our text for this morning, Jesus says: "Which of you men, if your son asks for a loaf of bread will give him a stone? Or also, if he asks for a fish will give him a snake? If therefore you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in the heavens give good gifts to those who ask?"

Here Jesus compares and contrasts the love of a human father with the love of our heavenly Father. Many people, especially Christians, do the same thing. In other words, our image of God is linked to our experience with our dad. This can be good or bad depending on your experience with your father.

Randy Travis, who wrote the song, "A Love without End, Amen," had a very loving father—if the song reflects his actual experience. The words go:

I got sent home from school one day with a shiner on my eye.
 Fightin' was against the rules and it didn't matter why.
 When dad got home I told that story just like I'd rehearsed,
 Then stood there on those tremblin' knees, and waited for the worst.
 And he said, "Let me tell you a secret about a father's love,
 A secret that my daddy said was just between us."
 He said, "Daddy's don't just love their children every now and then,
 It's love without end, Amen!
 It's love without end, Amen!"

When I became a father in the spring of '81,
 There was no doubt that stubborn boy was just like my father's son.
 And when I thought my patience had been tested to the end,
 I took my daddy's secret, and passed it on to him.

I said, "Let me tell you a secret about a father's love,
 A secret that my daddy said was just between us."
 I said, "Daddy's don't just love their children every now and then,
 It's love without end, Amen!
 It's love without end, Amen!"

Last night I dreamed I died and stood outside those pearly gates.
 When suddenly I realized there must be some mistake.
 If they know half the things I've done, they'll never let me in.
 Then somewhere from the other side, I heard these words again.
 They said, "Let me tell you a secret about a Father's love,
 A secret that my daddy said was just between us.
 You see, daddies don't just love their children every now and then,
 It's love without end, Amen!
 It's love without end, Amen!"

You can clearly see how Randy's image of God has been affected by his experience with his Dad. This is the way it for many people and there are two things I want to say about this. One is that if our kid's image of God is going to be influenced strongly by our behavior toward them, then we may want to adjust our behavior. Perhaps we could err on the side of leniency rather than strictness in non-crucial matters. I have a feeling that many dads are a little guilty over their strictness and that may be why they err on the permissive side with grandchildren.

3. We may want to adjust our image of God

The second thing I want to say is to those who had a father who was less than perfect. I had a wonderful dad and he showed his love by working hard, providing for his family and taking me with him to do things when he had time. The problem was, looking back, that he worked a LOT, so he was usually busy. Then, when he did something with me, like go fishing, he would get me set up in a spot and then he would take off fishing by himself, leaving me to learn to catch and unhook fish and untangle lines by myself.

It wasn't until I was older that I realized he grew up in a family with 10 brothers and sisters and he had very little supervision when he was growing up. He learned how to do his school studies, hunt, fish and play golf by trial and error not because a parent showed them how to do it. It was nothing personal. He loved me and demonstrated that love the same way his father ha

I cannot ever remember a time when I didn't believe that God was real and God was all around. I just believed that God, like my dad, was too busy to be bothered with my cares and concerns and too busy to help me face some of the difficult things I had to deal with and I blamed a LOT on God because I imagined He did not care.

But I eventually I came to the realization that God was NOT like that and I CHANGED my image of God to the loving God I found in the person of Jesus Christ. This took a conscious effort because the picture of God in my father's image was strong. But once my IMAGE of God began to change, my EXPERIENCE with the Lord also began to change and God became a loving Father who has each of the hairs of my head numbered and who cares deeply about the tiniest details of my life.

What might your new image of God be like? This story was sent in to *Guideposts* by Irene McDermott (9/86 p. 41 "Father's Day"):

In his hand—how safe I have felt since I was five years old. We lived in the country then and I attended school in a one-room schoolhouse a mile from our farm. One morning in early fall I walked to school beneath a threatening sky. I hoped it wouldn't rain; I'd outgrown my raincoat and boots.

Just before school let out, the clouds let loose. My classmates took their slickers from hooks on the wall, stepped into their boots and marched into the rain as happily as ducks waddling into a pond.

Only Miss Miller, my teacher, and I were left, and she was working at her desk, unaware that I was there. I had been in school only a few weeks, and I was too shy to tell the formidable teacher that I was afraid to walk home alone through the rain.

But at last I made for the door, slipping silently past Miss Miller. I stood at the threshold, listening to the hard rain splattering on the stone steps, trying to steel myself to leave. Oh, the fear I had. And then I hear another sound and...

Looking up, I saw my father. He was smiling at me. His hat was on the back of his head. He held a big black umbrella in one hand, and with the other he swept me up and hugged me. And then, we walked home along the country road, my hand tucked in his, the rain tapping on our umbrella.

Conclusion - God is our Perfect Dad

When you stand upon the threshold of eternity, listening to the memories of a lifetime, trying to steel yourself to leave, oh, the fear you may have. But then, if you have faith in Jesus, you will hear another sound and...

Looking up, you will see Jesus. He will be smiling at you. His hat may even be on the back of his head. He may not have a big black umbrella in one hand, but he will sweep you up and hug you. And then, with your hand tucked in his, you will walk home where you will live with Jesus and those you love forever and ever and ever.

Amen.