

## **Ephesians 6:1-4 N.T. 184 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup>Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. <sup>2</sup>“Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: <sup>3</sup>“so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

<sup>4</sup>And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

**Ephesians 6:1-4 N.T. Page 182**  
***“A Dad for Life”***

**Opening Prayer:** Please bow with me in prayer. Heavenly Father, we enter your holy presence today to learn from you and to be encouraged by you. Teach to us today your Holy Word and lead us in your paths of righteousness. In Jesus’ Name we pray, **Amen.**

**Introduction:**

**Today’s Fathers’ Day.** A day set aside here in America since 1910 when we honor our fathers. I’m going to open this morning by playing a clip of several people remembering the things their dads always used to say. Let’s listen in:

**{Play video “*Fathers’ Day Memories*” [1:45]}**

I saw many of you smiling and nodding in agreement, as those kids talked about their fathers. I suspect that you recognized elements of your own father in those people’s memories of their fathers. Their memories spanned the two sides of most fathers. **On one hand,** your father is the stern teacher, the one who lays down the law. **And on the other hand,** your father is the proud coach, the one who sees your true potential. A good father is a father that shows both of those sides. **Yes, today is Fathers’ Day. Today is a day set aside for memories of our fathers.**

**PAUSE**

**Move I.**

**To honor your father is a good thing.** To honor is to show respect and to hold in proper regard. Our Bible lesson today from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, reiterates the fifth of the “**Ten Commandments**” God gave to Moses. Does anyone remember where you can find the “Ten Commandments” in the Bible? Well, you can find them listed in the Bible in two places. The first place is in Exodus chapter 20 and the second is in Deuteronomy chapter 5, which is like a commentary expounding on the Exodus 20 version. **The fifth commandment** as given in **Exodus 20:12 (NIV)** is: “**Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.**” Then, Deuteronomy 5:16 (NIV) expounds on this commandment by adding “**and that it may go well with you.**” As the Apostle Paul reminds us in our Bible lesson today, this is the first commandment that includes a promise. If you want to live long and to have things go well for you, you need to honor your father and your mother. So, it’s good that we celebrate Mother’s day on the second Sunday in May, and Fathers’ Day on the third Sunday in June.

**The video clip** we opened with today reminds us of the many things that our fathers frequently say to us. Sometimes fathers say instructive things like “**tuck your shirt in**” and “**keep your elbows off the table.**” But other times fathers say encouraging things like “**I’m proud of you**” and “**you did your best.**” Yes, we all remember lots of things our fathers have said to us.

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**It was 28 years** ago this month that my father died of cancer. Twenty-eight years is a long time, but I still remember lots of things my father use to say to me. One of my father's favorite sayings was, "**jobs done by halves aren't done right.**" My father would say that when I cut the grass in the front yard but hadn't cut the back. Or when I finished painting but hadn't yet cleaned the brush. Although that saying often irritated me back then, of course my father was right. Doing half a job really isn't enough. In life, we all need to finish the things we start.

**The things our fathers say** and do influence us in countless ways. The things our fathers say and do help shape us into the adults we become. In my case, **I'm my father's son.** I can't think of anyone who has influenced my life more than has my father. My mother was a good mother, but a boy needs his dad. After my father died, my brother-in-law came to me and said, "**The mantel has passed to you.**" That's a Biblical reference to the prophet Elijah passing his mantle to Elisha. Anyway, at that time I wasn't too sure what that meant. **All I knew** is that like my father, I too was an engineer. But my father was also a preacher, and in 1992, the thought of preaching had never crossed my mind. It would be another 10 years before God called me into full time ministry, but today I can see my life is unfolding as a **mirror image** of my father's life. My father was **raised Methodist** and became and **Baptist preacher**, and I was **raised Baptist** and became a **Methodist preacher.** My father worked the first part of his life as a **pastor** and the later part of his life as an **engineer.** I worked the first part of my life as an **engineer** and I'm now working in the latter part of my life as a **pastor.** Sure, I miss my dad, but I can think of no better way to honor him than to take up his mantle and wear it as best as I can. **Yes, to honor your father is a good thing.**

**End I.**

**Move II.**

**But a sign a maturity is also to recognize your father's weaknesses.** To honor your father does not mean that you should idolize him. It's never a good idea to worship the very ground that your father walks on. After all, our fathers are only human. That means that all of our fathers suffer from the frailties and weakness that are common to fallen human beings. For some of you here today, those weaknesses are all too obvious. In fact, your father's weaknesses may actually overshadow his strengths. Some of you may have fathers who aren't very good at being a dad. **Perhaps** your father doesn't get along with your mother. **Or perhaps** your father doesn't relate to kids very well. **Or perhaps** your father's struggling so hard trying to live his own life, that he has no time or energy left to help you live yours. 50s and 60s TV shows like "***Father Knows Best***," and "***Leave it to Beaver***," no longer cut it in an age of reality TV. In the real world, everyone knows that real fathers always have flaws. But then **Bart Simpson's dad, Homer**, probably swings the pendulum too far the other way. We all need a balanced view when remembering our fathers. All too often, we rely on faulty images of fatherhood.

As Christians, many of us think of ourselves as having two fathers. We have an **earthly father**, and a **heavenly Father**. While our earthly father is completely human and flawed, our heavenly father is completely divine and perfect. I want to share a quote with you today by the Scottish Theologian and devotional author, **William Barclay**. Barclay is best known for his **devotional commentaries** on each book of the Bible. Anyway, the quote I want to share by William Barclay is:

**We can never afford to forget** that we teach our children to call God Father, and the only conception of fatherhood that they can have is the conception, which we give them. **Human fatherhood** should be molded and modeled after the pattern of the fatherhood of God.

Our earthy fathers should strive to live and act like our Heavenly Father. Yet we know that no earthly father, no matter how devoted or spiritual, can ever fully achieve that ideal. Our earthly fathers always provide a flawed and imperfect image of our Father in Heaven. **When it comes to these images of fatherhood, I think we're all suffering from another one of those chicken and egg arguments.** How does our earthly father reflect our heavenly Father and vice versa? While I was in seminary, my theology professor, **Dr. Susan Nelson**, was very concerned about our human fathers as an analogy for God. In fact, she wasn't even comfortable with calling God, "Father." This was because Dr. Nelson's earthly father wasn't much of a father at all. He was one of those fathers that I sarcastically call a "**Triple A**" father. Those are fathers who are "**absent, abusive, or alcoholic,**" or worse still, all three. Society has another name for fathers like those; it calls them "**deadbeat dads.**" These are fathers who don't live up to their responsibility of being a father.

**My seminary professor's** father had abandoned her family when she was very young, leaving her mother alone to raise her and her sister. If this is the only image you have a father, I think you can understand how it would be very difficult to relate to God as a father. **It might be easier** to see God as being your Heavenly Mother. But the fact that earthly fathers can and do fall far short of the heavenly ideal, doesn't change how God relates to us as a loving parent caring for a child.

**As we honor our earthly father today,** we must never idolize them. We do need to remember our father's strengths. **But a sign a maturity is also to recognize your father's weaknesses as well.**

**End II.**

**Move III.**

**And a good father instructs his children in God's ways.** A good father knows that his own ways aren't perfect, but that the ways of our Heavenly Father are. **The ancient Israelites** knew it was important to teach their child about God and we need to remember that it's still important to teach our children about God today. In **Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NRSV)** we read, "**keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.**" Talking about God and God's way isn't just something we're supposed to do in Sunday school or on Sunday morning's here in church. We're to talk about the things of God when we sit at home and when we walk along the road. When we lie down and when we get up. We're to talk about the things of God as naturally as we talk about everything else that's important in life. That's the ideal that we're all supposed to strive for.

I was very blessed to have a father who loved to talk about the things of God. Growing up, most of our dinner table conversations centered on God. We talked about sin and grace, about free will and responsibility. My dad used to joke that we were all getting a seminary education. To this day, it's common for conversations with my brothers and sisters to find their way to matters of God. I remember once my sister Anna and I exchanged emails **about baptism**. We hashed through the balance between emphasizing **human response** and **God's grace**. Oh, that everyone could have a father who would take the lead spiritually with his family.

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**When I was teenager**, my father had a graphic artist friend of his design an emblem that he used on many of his writings about our relationship with God. Since my father's death, I've used the emblem on my business cards and even constructed a computerized version of the emblem. As you can see, the emblem is in the shape of a heart and is loaded with symbols taken from the Old Testament. The only words on the emblem come from **1 Timothy 4:7b** "**Train yourself in godliness.**" That was my father's priority in life, and he wanted it to be a priority in each of his children's lives too.

**We live in a culture** that considers physical fitness to be very important. Many people have memberships in health clubs and fitness centers. In the last few years, I've taken to walking. I do my best to walk at least 4-miles every day. Physical fitness is important. **But spiritual fitness** is even more important. Let's look at the quote from my father's emblem in its complete context. **1 Timothy 4:7b-8 (NRSV)** says, "**Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.**" A real dad is a dad who's interested in training his children not just in the ways of this life, but also in the ways of the life to come. That's what I meant when I gave today's message the title, "*A Dad for Life.*" When your earthly father points you toward your Heavenly Father, that's a dad who's leading you in the way that leads to life eternal. A good father is both a stern teacher and a proud coach. **And yes, a good father always instructs his children in God's ways.**

**End III.**



**Conclusion:** We all have memories of the things our fathers used to say to us. We have memories of our fathers as both the stern teacher and the proud coach. **Yes, to honor your father is a good thing.** As the fifth commandment tells us, if we want to live long and to have things go well for us, we need to honor our fathers and our mothers. **But a sign a maturity is also to recognize your father's weaknesses.** Fatherhood is to be molded and modeled on the pattern of the fatherhood of God, but your earthly father is still human. **And a good father instructs his children in God's ways.** A good father will talk about the things of God while you sit and home and while you walk along the road. A good father not only teaches his children about this life, but also about the life to come. Today is Fathers' day. Today is the day when you celebrate that you have two fathers. ***"A Dad...for Life."***

**Closing Prayer:** Let's pray. Thank you, Lord, for fathers, who teach us, and love us, and prod us on our way. May we honor our fathers today so that we may have a long life and that everything will go well for us. **Amen!**

**10:30 Closing Hymn: "God Will Take Care of You" Red Hymnal No. 472**  
Verses 1, 3, and 4

**Sending Forth:** If your dad's still living, tell him that you love him today. And if your dad's gone on to glory, honor his memory by remembering the good things that he taught you. Go forth, and train yourself in godliness, for it is it profitable in this life and in the life to come. **And all of God's people said...Amen!**