

A Message to Fathers

For those of you who might have forgotten today is Father's Day. Seeing how our culture is moving in a very strange and bizarre direction, I figure I should say a few words to mark the occasion. After all, who knows how many more years this secular holiday will be around seeing how the day itself celebrates masculinity, a very gender specific role. My assumption is it will eventually be cancelled. But before that happens, let's take this opportunity to reflect on the role of the father within the family structure. As Martin Luther so wisely pointed out being part of this world means holding various vocations or stations. Every person's life, then, can be divided into four vocational categories: government, labor, church and family. We move seamlessly within these four spheres as we establish priorities, divide our time, employ our talents, and set goals for our individual lives. Each of these vocations is important in its own right, but it is the vocational role of family which interests me most this morning. It should come as no surprise that the family is under attack in America. The family structure, which in times past was looked upon as sacrosanct—as a vital nucleus necessary for the preservation and wellbeing of society—is currently under constant assault. Now, more than ever, the Church needs to have a voice; yet now, more than ever, the Church has been silenced. The authoritative word about marriage and family comes less from the Church and more from the government and secular media. It is our society, which seems to have the final word; dictating the terms and passing judgment. And what a bang up job they are doing, right?! Just think about all the changes that have occurred in just the past five years. It's a scary thought to think about what the next five years holds for us as a nation.

God demands to be heard. One way or another, He will have the final word on all that is taking place in the home, in the family, and in the world. He cannot be silenced. And He has chosen us to be His witnesses. It's a high honor to be the voice to which God joins His voice. How great a privilege it is that God would trust us sinners to speak on His behalf! And the only way this happens, the only way the

Church's message has any real meaning in the surrounding culture, is for it to go forth from this holy place and be carried into the world. And there is no better place to begin than in the home. So I speak directly to fathers, but really to all parents, when I ask: How do you want your children to speak your name in the years to come? How do you want them to remember you? As simply a great provider, as the bread-winner of the family? Do you want to be remembered as the purveyor of material goods or do you want instead to be remembered as the purveyor of truth? I pray it's the latter. Too often we reduce parenting to nothing more than meeting the physical needs or wants of our kids. But fatherhood in particular, and parenthood in general, is so much more than just providing for the temporal things of this life. As fathers, we hold a special role in the family. Any man can make a baby—that's just simple biology—but it takes a real father to be the head of his household. Such a role does not mean that we get to browbeat or lord it over our children, but rather that we lead by example. Luther likened the role of a father to that of a pastor. For all intents and purposes, a father is a pastor to his family. And what that means is that God has entrusted you to lead your family in a life of devotion and fidelity. God has entrusted you to teach your children that, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". And this is done not only in your words, but more so in your actions. More important than anything you will ever say to your kids is how you act and react to the many changes of life. Do your children see you take all things to God in prayer? Do they see you bear up under the trials and tribulations of this world and seek refuge in God alone? Do your children hear you confess your sins—to them, to others, and ultimately to God? Do your children see you model a baptismal life whereby you get up each morning thanking God for the new life you have in Christ, and then go to bed each evening praying, "Into Your hands, O Lord, I commend my body and my soul"? Do you teach them how to suffer well, to navigate the trials in their own life, to give and receive forgiveness, to take the lower seat of humility, to take pride in their work, to find joy in giving and not just in receiving? Stand up. Stand tall. Stand firm. Live by your convictions. And for God's sake do something courageous with

your life. These types of godly lessons do not come natural to a child, or to an adult for that matter, and must be learned and practiced every day.

The discipline of the Christian life must be taught by you, but ultimately these lessons come from God. A large part of parenting is trying not to get in the Lord's way; doing our best, really, not to make a total mess of it all. In the end, the most important part of fatherhood is praying that God would forgive you when you fail so miserably at the task....and we all fail miserably at it! For there is only one perfect Father and that is our Heavenly Father. He alone loves without conditions, gives without thought of return, and forgives without any strings attached. He alone is tender in His discipline, merciful in His speech, and patient beyond comprehension. Above all, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, if God is anything, He is a God of second chances. It is never too late to recover God in your home. "This is the day that the Lord has made!" and with it comes a chance at redemption. A fresh start. A new beginning. For in Christ, the new day brings a new life. And as long as Christ is Lord of your life, then all things are made new in Him...even us fathers! Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Jeremy H. Mills