

# *“Fathers: Encouraging, Comforting and Urging”*

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*I Thessalonians 2:7-12*

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Happy Father’s Day! (Remember we have a gift for you, after the service.)

Shawn will be here later this afternoon, and we are going to have a Father’s Day Dinner at home – which includes Baby Back Ribs, and crepes with strawberries. I’m excited about this Father’s Day because – my son is a father! We will celebrate together with our wives, children and grandchild – Bobby.

Father’s Day! Not on our liturgical calendar, but perhaps it should be. (Mother’s Day too.) A day to honor and thank our fathers for being loving, encouraging, comforting and urging (more about these later).

Thinking about fathers, dads, men, I recently came across a “Men’s Thesaurus” – some of you many have noticed that men don’t always say what they mean. So, allow me to translate.

When a man says “It would take too long to explain.” He means: “I have no idea how it works.”

When a man says “Take a break, Honey. You are working too hard.” He means: “I can’t hear the game over the vacuum cleaner.”

When a man says “That’s interesting dear.” He means: “Are you still talking?”

When a man says “Can I help with dinner?” He means: “Why isn’t it ready yet?”

When a man says “Uh huh, sure honey,” or “Yes dear.” He means: Absolutely nothing – it’s a conditioned response.

When a man says “You know how bad my memory is.” He means: “I can remember the theme song to ‘Hogan’s Heroes’, the phone number of my first girl I ever kissed and the vehicle identification numbers of every car I ever owned – but yes, I forgot your birthday.”

When a man says, “I can’t find it.” He means: “It didn’t fall into my outstretched hand so I’m completely clueless.”

When a man says “I’m not lost. I know exactly where we are.”

He means: “No one will ever see us alive again.”

I hope that helps!! And I hope this helps. Now hold onto your seats (pews): Recent sociological studies have found that fathers have an important positive influence on their children. (No kidding? Duh! We needed studies to tell us this? Well, actually in our day and age – yes, we need such studies to set the historic, traditional record straight – once again; fathers have an important positive influence on their children!

When fathers are engaged with their children – boys have fewer behavior problems, and girls have fewer psychological problems, and both boys and girls exhibit enhanced cognitive development. These studies have also found that the mere presence of a father in the home reduced aggressive behavior in the children.

“Our detailed 20-year review shows that overall, children reap positive benefits if they have active

and regular engagement with a father figure” says Dr. Anna Sarkadi from the Department of Women’s and Children’s Health, Sweden.

For example, we found various studies that showed that children who had positively involved father figures were less likely to smoke and get into trouble with the police, achieved better levels of education and developed good friendships with children of both sexes.

Long-term benefits included women who had better relationships with partners and a greater sense of mental and physical well-being at the age of 33 if they had a good relationship with their father at 16.”

(“Science Daily”, Feb. 15, 2008)

Active, loving fathers are important and needed!! Their children need them!!

Again this should actually be old news, for it is old news! Allow me to refer to a letter that’s almost 2,000 years old, I Thessalonians. Paul wrote to his house church in the mid first century A.D. Paul started this Christian community, and is writing to them - to encourage them in their faith. In the correspondence, Paul reminds them of his time with them (including others who were working with him). Paul brings back to their minds how gentle they were with them – like a mother caring for her little children. (Like a mother with her newborn, walking and walking with him, or like a grandfather, walking and walking and walking with him, not daring to sit down for Bobby, I mean the “little one” cries out – he doesn’t like that! But, I digress.)

Paul is using their pre-understanding about life, about parents – how they love and care for their children. And Paul is explaining – just like “parents” the Christian community also is to behave this way. He declares that he and the others loved them so much, like mothers and fathers, that they shared this wondrous “good news”, and they shared their very lives (selves). How dear they had become to them! “Remember” he tells them. “Remember.” “Recall how we dealt with each of you – like a father deals with his own children.” Paul could not think of any higher examples than mothers and fathers (keep that in mind).

Two thousand years ago – it was known, taken for granted that fathers were necessary and good for their children. Paul is saying, “Hey, we were just like the active fathers who lovingly deal with their children!” How? By encouraging his children, by comforting his children, and by urging his children. Not a bad synopsis!

Fathers –Active, loving fathers – how we need to encourage our children! They have bad days. They get discouraged – relationships get fractured, school issues can overwhelm, sports sometimes cause a fumble, and a myriad of other issues confront our children.

Fathers need to encourage their children – a good word – not a critical word is more often needed. Some of you may be familiar with Tony Dungy. He led the Indianapolis Colts to Super Bowl victory in 2007. He and his loving wife have six children. Tony believes his primary job as a coach is to build men worthy of being role models to a nation of boys who look up to them. Character, integrity and courage are virtues Tony believes in and emulates.

As a father and coach he endeavors to encourage his children and the young men he coaches. He declares, “We have an amazing ability to accomplish whatever our minds tell us we can do, a phenomenon that has been recognized throughout history. The great American novelist Henry James directed ‘Be Not Afraid of Life. Believe that Life is Worth Living, and Your Belief will Help Create the Fact.’ James could have been a football coach.” (Uncommon, p. 104)

Fathers – encourage your children – open the future to them!

Fathers, comfort your children. Yes, mom will do much of this, but do your part. Sometimes life is a scary, fearful place. Be watchful. Be attentive to your children. Look for signals of fear, worry, discomfort and reach out to him or her. Show you are interested. Give her/him a hug. Support them.

Tony Dungy tells of his young daughter Jade. One night he was tucking her in. He shares, “We had said her prayers, and I pulled the covers up and bent down to give her a kiss. She hugged my neck, pulled me toward her, and whispered into my ear, ‘keep me safe while I sleep, okay?’ ‘Of course I will, sweat heart.’ And I meant it.”

Of course he meant it! That’s what a father does! Protect – comfort his children!

And there are times when fathers need to urge our children.

Urge – “to endeavor to persuade.” There are times when fathers need to share their accrued wisdom. From what we have learned, like the writer of Proverbs – “get wisdom, insight. Love wisdom and she (wisdom) will guard you.” (Proverbs 4:5-6). There are times when parents, fathers, do know some things.

Fathers – there are many issues of life that one should not leave open ended, for children to just “choose”. They need wisdom filled with guidance. They need a way of looking at life. They need a narrative – a faith story to guide them into maturity, a positive, life enriching faith story. And you need to provide it! Another reason church is important. Don’t leave a vacuum for their young minds – for it will fill up with something, anything! Fathers - use your wisdom to guide, to urge them into lives of wholeness and purpose!

Being a father is an awesome responsibility! Fathers, active, loving fathers are needed! Our culture must shift its trajectory of absent fathers. So much of this shift must take place in the home where boys and girls are taught the virtues of responsibility, where boys are encouraged, comforted and urged to become responsible, loving, caring you men, and in time, active, loving fathers.

Amen.