

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

BEST DAD EVER
Happy Father's Day



FATHER'S DAY || **BEST DAD EVER**

Father's Day is always interesting in church. First of all, there is not a photo booth in sight. (You're welcome, dads.) Secondly, do you see that people are not nearly as dressed up? Let's all take a second and remember Mother's Day. It felt like a pep rally, didn't it? We dressed up, took cute photos, and packed out every restaurant in town by noon. There were flowers, pictures, and gifts galore.

Now, here we are. Look around. It always blows me away how different Mother's Day and Father's Day feel. Mother's Day is usually the third or fourth biggest attendance of the year, and Father's Day is often among the lowest. On Mother's Day, there are usually rows reserved, but Father's Day doesn't carry the same expectation, it seems. Why is that? I have a theory.

Is it because the tone of the Father's Day messages tends to be lofty or even derogatory? Sadly, these sermons can feel more like an intervention than a celebration. If that has happened to you, we are so sorry. We can make our dads feel a sense of guilt, shame, or pain in the church on Father's Day.

That's not our goal for today. Right now, we want to celebrate dads for all they do. So, if you are a father or father figure for someone, please stand up so we can recognize you. Fathers, we are cheering for you and we cherish you. The work you do is difficult and often invisible. We want you to know that we see you and we support you. Also, we love you and are here for you! In today's message, we will examine what it means to be an earthly father who mirrors the Heavenly Father to their kids.

I just heard the air leave the room. I hear you thinking, "Did they just say that there is no pressure, but this sermon is about how to live like...God?" Honestly, yes. That's what's about to happen. However, we want you to see that God has done most of the heavy lifting for you. As Jesus promised in the Gospel of Matthew, His yoke is light. This sermon is not designed to imprison you; it's designed to empower you. God has goals for the dads in this world, yes. However, He's prepared you for it. I promise.

These three key principles should not complicate your life—they are designed to simplify it. By channeling three key character traits of a good and godly dad, we can experience the gift of godly parenting. We see these three principles show up in Paul's teaching about families in Ephesians 6.

READ: Ephesians 6:2-4

“Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—
“so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” Fathers,
do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction
of the Lord.

Kids are strange, aren't they? When I was just a toddler, I would slip on my dad's steel-toed work boots and shuffle around the house. I would talk like him, dress like him, and move like him. Looking back, that was a challenge since the boots went up to my kneecaps and often sent me falling right to the floor. Regardless, I loved pretending to be my dad. Most young kids want to be like their parents. They watch them closely and try to mimic their actions as best as they can. This is ultimately how we learn to talk, tie our shoes, and cheer for the same football team as our dads.

Since our kids are watching, what character traits do we need to show up in our lives? According to Paul, we can see three—Devotion, Affection, and Discipleship. (Yes, they spell out DAD to make it easy to remember.)

Devotion

Few things are as powerful as a devoted dad. Paul commands, “Honor your father and mother.” Notice that this passage does not have perimeters on age, either. Every dad should honor his mother—even if he has kids of his own. Every father should show devotion to his dad—even if his dad is retired and spends his days watching the news. Paul, echoing Moses, commanded that everyone “honor their father and mother” so that “[they] may enjoy a long life” (Ephesians 4:2).

The Bible promises that respect increases life expectancy. Seriously, who doesn't want their families to live long lives? The Bible suggests that honor is the secret. We do this with a culture of honor and surrender to our authority figures and those we are in authority over. Fathers, display respect for your kids. Respect your spouse. Respect your boss. Respect your employees. Respect the waiter at the restaurant this afternoon. When you do this, your family will follow.

On the flip side, your family will follow any negative examples, as well. It's sad, but many of us demand respect without living lives that reveal it. Before you start looking outward, always look inward. Are you living out the devotion that you demand? Does your family see how much investment you put into them?

We need to live lives of devotion. What is devotion, you ask? Devotion is about commitment and love working together in harmony. We don't like it, but it's true: your actions speak louder than your intentions. Your children are always watching, absorbing your actions like little sponges. Our kids observe how we treat others, how we handle challenges, and how we walk in faith. Devotion means staying loyal and committed even when it's difficult.

How do you do this every day? Be sure to show your devotion to your family by honoring your time with them—especially their mom and their grandparents. It could mean that you always prioritize a shared meal without distractions. It could mean that you clean up after said meal without hesitation. It could mean that family prayers take place every night, regardless of how much you have to do. Devotion is contagious. When you grow in your devotion, your family follows.

Affection

As you can see, Paul is taking us somewhere intentionally. The Apostle Paul wants you to see the role of the father as one of “training and instruction” (Ephesians 6:4). That's right. We are heading toward discipleship and training. We love talking about that, so let's get right to it! “Kids, listen up. Let's hear what wisdom Dad has to share.”

Not so fast, though. There is a line right before that one. Paul specifically commands “Fathers, do not exasperate your children” before he invites us to instruct, train, and disciple them. What does he mean by that? I like how the New Living Translation elaborates: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Do you see Paul's warning? Before you train your kids, examine your heart. Your training should not be producing the fruit of frustration, nor should it provoke anger. He's not calling you out, I promise. Paul is simply saying that affection needs to be

behind your instruction. Why do you want your kids to live wisely? Because you love them.

God does not want you to lose your connection or your affection while raising kids. Why? He knows they can be confusing and complicated. We need to be gently reminded of our love before we jump into our next lecture. (Or worse, before we fly off the handle.) While it seems silly, how often do we do this? We can get blinded by our children's foolishness, can't we? Next thing you know, our emotions get in the way of our affection. Our voices go up. Our heart beats fast. Our punishments get harsh. Paul wants us to slow down and allow affection to inform our correction.

We've covered the importance of devotion, which is defined as our investment in the family, and our affection, which represents our heart for the family. Now, with these two foundational pieces in place, we can step into the last role of a godly dad.

Discipleship

Jesus called all of us to be His followers, dads included. If you want to be a dad dedicated to discipleship, be sure you're following Jesus closer than you expect your kids to. Do you meet Jesus in prayer before you talk to your kids? Do you worship before you share your day's worries? Do you meditate before you step into the madness of the daily grind?

Paul taught that we should we bring up our kids with "training and instruction" (Ephesians 6:4). This is the part of the sermon where excitement usually sweeps over the room. You are probably tempted to nudge your son and say, "You should listen to me, pal." Not so fast, though. Paul explained, "Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Where does our discipline come from? The Lord. Where does our instruction come from? The Lord.

Our instruction has a clear foundation—Jesus. If we want to be good disciple-makers as parents, we need to be engaged in discipleship ourselves. How are we getting the truth to share? How much time are we spending in prayer? How many friends have we made in our church community? These are all foundational principles to your own parenting. You need to be sure you're living the kind of spiritual life you want your kids to mirror.

So what steps should we take to disciple our kids?

First, we need to be an example. Our kids are like sponges, soaking up everything we do and say. If we want them to follow Jesus, we need to show them what following Jesus looks like in our own lives. It's not about being perfect; it's about authentic.

Second, we should bring Scripture into daily discussions. Just like Paul instructed fathers to bring up their children in training and instruction, we need to prioritize teaching our kids about God's Word and God's ways. This could look like family devotions every night, reading the Bible together every morning, or discussing sermon points during Sunday supper. Whatever you decide to do, just focus on being consistent. If it feels weird at first, that's good! It means that your family sees the difference.

Third, we must create a culture of prayer. Your kids have learned to go to you when life seems confusing. Instead of claiming to have the answers, show them Who you turn to when life is confusing. Pray with them often. Pray with them when things are difficult. Pray with them when everything seems perfect. Show your kids that your success is the sum of your surrender. As a dad dedicated to discipleship, allow prayer to define your personality.

Pray before the day.

Pray before you play.

Pray before dinner.

Pray before bed.

Pray together.

Pray privately.

In all things, mirror a lifestyle of prayer, affection, and devotion. It's caught, not taught. So, as we close, we want to wish you a Happy Father's Day. As you go into this week, strive to be a godly dad. Live out a life of devotion, affection, and discipleship. When you struggle, God's grace fills in the gaps. When you continue, amazing things will follow. Happy Father's Day!

TALK IT OUT s

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week and the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What stuck out to you the most from today's message?

Q2: What, in your mind, makes a good dad? If you're comfortable sharing, how have you seen these play out with your own father or father figure?

Q3: What is the primary role of a godly dad, in your opinion?

Q4: A godly dad shows Devotion, Affection, and Discipleship. Which of these do you feel is the hardest for dads to do? How can you help the father figures in your life live out this role?

Q5: Why is it important to show affection before trying to begin training and discipleship?

APPLICATION 01: Reflect on your family prayer life and consider how you can create a culture of prayer within your family.

APPLICATION 02: Encourage your dad! Write out a message, letter, or card to your dad or a father figure to thank them for all they've done for you in your life.

READING PLAN

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

Ephesians 6:4

Proverbs 22:6

Colossians 3:21

Psalms 103:13

Proverbs 20:7

Joshua 24:15

1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.