

Father's Day 2017

"If" - Seven Things I'd Do Differently As A Dad

Ephesians 6:1-4 - *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Colossians 3:18-21 - *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*

How often I have thought, "Boy, if I could only do THAT ONE over again."

Maybe it was a wrong decision... a misspoken word... a question of ethics where I did the easy thing instead of the RIGHT thing.

Truth is, if I could somehow go back in time and change some things – you better know I would!

Especially as it pertains to being a dad.

And most of it is because I wanted to take a short cut – I wanted to travel down the road of least resistance

But what I have learned is that – **The path of least resistance is what makes rivers and "men" crooked**

I wonder men, if you could go back - would YOU do some things differently?

Sadly, life doesn't afford us any do-overs.

Parenting is hard and kids don't come with instruction manuals.

So today, I want to pass on some things I've learned the hard way, to help you not make the same mistakes I made.

But before I start, I want you to understand that FAMILY is very important to God.

It is the first and foundational institution of the human race.

As the family goes, so goes the church, so goes society.

Since the family IS so important, God was sure to include clear instructions for the effective operation of the family.

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, provides practical insight into how the healthy home operates.

Paul wrote both, Ephesians AND Colossians. As you study them you will notice that the early chapters deal with errant BELIEFS in the church.

But the second half of his letters confronts errant BEHAVIORS. One of his common topics is the family.

With so much misinformation about the family being promoted by the world, it is important that we consider what GOD has to say about the Christian home and how it should be different from what we see in the world.

His wisdom transcends time - always relevant - always helpful.

With Paul's counsel and my own regretful experiences to draw from, I want to share **7 things you can do, dads, to keep from blowing it with your family:**

1. First, to make your home the place God designed it to be, you need to Love your wife and make your relationship with HER a TOP priority.

The greatest thing a man can do for his children - AFTER leading them to Jesus - is to love their mother the way Christ loves His Church.

Your priorities, your passion, your plans – should be poured into this important relationship.

Single, men go to great lengths making their girlfriends feel cherished. But once the vows are exchanged, the effort seems to stop.

But the Holy Spirit challenges men "to love their wives" in both passages. In Ephesians 5, Paul says, "*husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.*" And in Colossians, he says, "*Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.*"

"Love" her... the word is "agape" - SACRIFICE YOURSELF for her - GIVE of yourself - even when you don't feel like your love is being reciprocated or appreciated ⇒ LOVE her!

The very best counsel I can give you that will help your children grow up to be happy, well-adjusted adults, is for you to love their mother and to show it every day in the way you speak to her, the affection and kindness you show her.

Your children learn what love IS by watching how you relate to your wife.

They learn about the roles of men and women by watching you.

There is a WHOLE LOT of confusion about 'gender identity' today - maybe it's because parents

don't have healthy relationships with each other?!?

Girls learn about godly affection – and how a man should TREAT a woman by watching dad.

Boys learn how to handle stressful moments that happen in every family by watching dad.

Kids learn about godly priorities and what real commitment looks like – all from YOUR example.

Families are under incredible stress today: economically, socially, and spiritually – from life's demands. But I want you to know that SOME of the stresses we are under are self-inflicted – men aren't doing their jobs.

Even a casual observer can see that we place too much value on the wrong things – and it's had an effect: our kids watch how WE live and grow up with wrong priorities.

They get into financial trouble, because they have learned from US to leave God out of their budgets.

They quit going to church when they get older because we taught them to put everything else ahead of God.

When playing ball is more important than church attendance, how can we act confused when they don't want to attend later in life?

In order to compensate for our lack of time and attention, we shower them with stuff – and we wonder why they grow up demanding, unappreciative, and selfish.

As you contemplate making basic changes that will forever impact your family for good, remember - loving your wife is one of the most important, impactful things you can do.

When you put God first and your wife second, above your kids, job, and SELF... your home-life will transform before your very eyes.

2. Second, if I could do it all over again, I would spend more time with my children.

Several years ago, Dr. James Dobson said, "Children spell 'love' T-I-M-E." When I heard that, I was immediately brought under conviction... but I never really made the changes I needed to make.

If I am disappointed in myself about ANYTHING, I am MOST disappointed that I made my church-work a higher priority than my family life.

I made myself available whenever someone else called – even if it meant missing a birthday or family night... but was often unavailable when MY family needed me.

I wish someone had told me early on that a large part of being a good pastor is being a good husband and father – that part of providing for them - - - is prioritizing them.

Those of my generation may remember the song "Cat's in the Cradle" by Harry Chapin? He wrote:

A child arrived just the other day,

He came to the world in the usual way.

But there were planes to catch and bills to pay.

He learned to walk while I was away.

And he was talking 'fore I knew it, and as he grew,

He'd say, "I'm gonna be like you, dad.

You know I'm gonna be like you."

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon,

Little boy blue and the man in the moon.

"When you coming home, dad?" "I don't know when,

But we'll get together then.

You know we'll have a good time then."

My son turned ten just the other day.

He said, "Thanks for the ball, dad, come on let's play.

Can you teach me to throw?" I said "Not today,

I got a lot to do." He said, "That's ok."

And he walked away, but his smile never dimmed,

Said, "I'm gonna be like him, yeah.

You know I'm gonna be like him."

Well, he came from college just the other day,

So much like a man I just had to say,

"Son, I'm proud of you. Can you sit for a while?"

He shook his head, and he said with a smile.

"What I'd really like, dad, is to borrow the car keys.

See you later. Can I have them please?"
I've long since retired and my son's moved away.
I called him up just the other day.
I said, "I'd like to see you if you don't mind."
He said "I'd love to dad, if I could find the time.
You see, my new job's a hassle, and the kid's got the flu,
But it's sure nice talking to you, dad.
It's been sure nice talking to you."
And as I hung up the phone, it occurred to me,
He'd grown up just like me.
My boy was just like me.

I'm not here to lay a guilt trip on you. I know that most of you feel like you are doing the very best you possibly can.
What I AM doing is asking you to THINK – think about the long term effects of your decisions.

Time is a precious commodity – and we trade it for the things that we deem important.

Ask God to help you realize that your family IS most important.

Something, somewhere, has got to give.

It shouldn't always be your family that has to sacrifice.

3. Third, if I could go back and change some things, not only would loving my wife and spending time with my kids be a priority, I would avoid perfectionism.

Paul said to the Ephesians, "*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger.*" And in Colossians, he said, "*Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*"

If I could go back – I would be less critical...not so hard to please.

I wish someone would have told me that you really CAN parent in a positive way.

Instead of blowing a gasket every time they mess up, I would be more patient.

I would give them a more realistic model to follow.

I would tell them about the weakness I had to overcome as a young person... that I stumbled and made mistakes, and often failed.

I would help them know I understand and am cheering for them, and that they should never doubt that I am in their corner - even when they blow it.

You see, kids are often frustrated with the standard of perfection we set before them.

Most kids really believe it is impossible to please their parents.

Kids LONG for their parent's approval – and they get frustrated when they feel like they will never measure up or make us happy.

Don't demand perfection.

Sometimes I think we are more concerned with how we LOOK to our FRIENDS than how we look to our kids!

If I could go back, I would lighten up. Overreacting gets old.

If we are smart, we will realize that humans make mistakes – especially little humans.

And if we want people to cut US some slack when WE mess up, maybe we ought to cut our children a little slack when THEY mess up.

If you want to frustrate a kid and turn him against you, keep demanding perfection.

The next time YOU blow it, be glad you have a heavenly Father who doesn't demand perfection from YOU.

4. Fourth, I would be a better listener.

I would listen to what they say. I would listen to what they are NOT saying.

I would listen to their pains and problems and worries.

I would listen instead of constantly telling them to wait for a commercial.

I would do a better job listening when they are young, so they will want to talk to me when they are older.

Interesting how, when kids are small, they are little chatterboxes.

But when they get older, they quit talking to their parents – preferring to talk to their friends.

Some of this is natural. Some of it isn't.

When dads put a greater priority on a sit-com than they do listening to their children, when dads are more concerned with their work or hobbies than talking to their children, don't be surprised when they think you don't care.

5. Fifth, I would pray more.

We have tried to raise our children with prayer, but I often fail to pray like I should.

I haven't prayed enough that I would be the father they need.

I haven't prayed for patience and kindness like I should.

I would pray more.

Pray for their salvation

their purity

their choices in friends and in a mate

Pray that they would grow up to serve the Lord.

Pray about the little things that have a way of becoming HUGE when God is left out of the equation.

Pray more...

6. Sixth, I would encourage more.

Words have GREAT power. I would affirm and encourage them. Why?

Because all my years of growing up, I never remember hearing my father say, "I'm proud of you."

Or, "I'm glad you are MY son." I don't EVER remember him telling me he loved me.

And because of that, I spent so much of my life looking for affirmation from others... growing up to be a man-pleaser, constantly struggling with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

I don't want my children to go through that.

I want them to know that I am the proudest daddy in the world... that they don't have to look for affirmation somewhere else.

7. And seventh, if I could go back and change some things, I would realize that my actions speak louder than words. What I DO means more than my good intentions.

Looking back, I realize some very important stuff went undone.

I should have listened to God's gentle voice of conviction sooner – because before you know it..... they're gone.

7 things I'd do differently... WOW! That's a lot of heavy stuff! But after being a dad for 26 years, I have a lot of mistakes to ponder.

As you've listened to ME, I wonder if there might be some things God would have YOU do differently?

Men, our time is short.

Our opportunities to influence our kids for Christ are passing quickly.

And though I can't do anything about yesterday,

I can do EVERYTHING about today.

Some of us need to start with the basics, and get saved.

You can't be the father or grandfather God would have you be without taking that basic step.

And today, you have the opportunity to enter a relationship with a God who will not only forgive your failures, but will bless you with wisdom.

Will YOU come give your heart to Christ????

Maybe you are saved but you long to be a better father, and you want God's help.

Listen, I know it's hard... So I encourage you to come to this altar for prayer... asking for forgiveness... and for strength.

Put some shoe-leather on your words and come ask God to help you, starting TODAY, to be a different, a better father.