



**Sermons from St. Marks
United Church of Christ
New Albany, Indiana**



**Being a Happy Father
Text: Ephesians 6:1-4
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I always get nervous preaching on Father's Day because I never really know what to say or where to begin. People come to church on Father's Day expecting to hear some pearls of wisdom drop from the preacher's mouth--sometimes giving parents a pep talk; other times perhaps giving some insights into being a good parent.

I used to know a great deal about parenting. I could give anyone terrific insights into the rearing of their children--until I had children. Having your own children has a tendency to decrease your expertise in parenting. As any parent knows, once you have your own children, the rules have a tendency to change. Real life rarely resembles 'the book.'

The reason for this is that children often say interesting things at the most interesting of times. Children in church are often amazing. I recently received some funny things kids have been known to say in church.

After the Christening of his baby brother in church, Jason sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car.

His father asked him three times what was wrong.

Finally, the boy replied,

That preacher said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I wanted to stay with you guys."

A Sunday school teacher asked her children as they were on the way to church service,

"And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?"

One bright little girl replied, "Because people are sleeping."

A wife invited some people to dinner.

At the table, she turned to their six-year-old daughter and said, "Would you like to say the blessing?"

"I wouldn't know what to say," the girl replied.

"Just say what you hear Mommy say," the wife answered.

The daughter bowed her head and said, "Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?"

So I began this week wondering what I was going to speak about today. Then I remembered the admonitions of one preaching professor who once said, "When you can't think of anything, try the Bible..."

Paul's words, "fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord," got me to thinking.

Paul's words have something of a two-edged meaning. One on hand they tell fathers not to get into the faces of their children and deal with them in intense anger; on the other hand Paul is saying that we, as parents, need to provide a sense of order in the lives of our children; we need to provide disciple and instruction in the ways of God.

So I thought I would come up with ways to encourage people to be happy fathers. The same things are applicable to those who are mothers, but, in fairness, many of the issues of fatherhood aren't the same as motherhood. In preparation for this sermon I read another sermon entitled, "Why Can't a Man be More Like a Woman?" where the author of the sermon said that many of the weaknesses fathers have are not the same weaknesses of mothers. So I am following this approach.

The first secret for being a happy father is to be a person of Godliness.

Some years ago, in another community, a man who was a member of my congregation told me that the greatest gift that a parent could pass off to his or her children was faith in Jesus Christ. I remember feeling strangely when the man told me this.

I did not feel strangely because I felt the man was wrong, but I felt unusual because the messenger, though a nice person, was not terribly faithful in his relationship with God. If his children were to learn Godliness from him, as he claimed, he did not live his life as a Godly person.

Being Godly does not require a great deal of outwardly pious behavior. It is not being ostentatious like the Scribes and the Pharisees. Being Godly does require worshiping God and living life in such a way that people can, in some way, be inspired.

Godly people teach their children to pray by praying.

Godly people teach their children to be charitable by being charitable.

Godly people teach their children faithfulness and fidelity by being faithful and loyal.

Godly people teach their children to Worship God in a regular manner by worshipping God in a regular manner.

Being a Godly person is more than just saying it--it means living Godliness as well as preaching it.

The second secret for being a happy father is that a happy father is one who live sacrificially for his children.

One of the key themes of Jesus is the issue of making sacrifices. His entire life was one large sacrifice for each and every one of us. When Jesus spoke of being sacrificial, it came from his heart. Sacrifice was at the core of Jesus' being.

If Jesus had the ability and the desire to offer his life up as a sacrifice to people he did not know one could expect fathers, who presumably love their children, to be sacrificial for the sake of their offspring.

If, as parents, our children are denied opportunities because we desire greater luxuries, than we are failing them.

If, as parents, our children live less comfortably so that we can live more comfortably, than we are failing them.

If, as parents, our children are denied important opportunities because we did not have them, than we are failing them.

Being a parent means making sacrifices for our children. As Jesus sacrificed himself for each of us, so are we challenged to make sacrifices for our children.

The third secret for being a happy father is making a lifelong commitment to your children.

I am troubled, periodically by parents, and 99% of the time it's the father who says this, that he is responsible for his daughter or son until that person hits 18 years old. From that point on their offspring is now an adult and on his or her own.

Parenthood is a lifelong responsibility. It is a job that never ends. From the time a child is born until the parent dies, or heaven forbid, the child dies first, the parent has some sort of responsibility toward his or her child. The commitment to one's children never ends.

In the late 1980's there was a terrible earthquake in Armenia and thousands of people perished.

One father was at home worrying about his son--who was at school. As the father sat at

home, he remembered something he repeated often to his son--“No matter what happens, I will always be there for you.”

Remembering those words the father went to the school and found only a pile of rubble. He went to the corner of the school where his son's classroom had been and began picking through the rocks, searching for his son. He would not rest or quit until he found his son, or his son's body.

Many people told him that his search was hopeless, but he had made a promise to his son. He dug for eight hours, 12 hours, 24 hours, 36 hours, and finally after picking up a stone during the 38th hour he heard his son's voice.

“Armand,” he cried out his son's name.

“Father, I knew you'd come. We've been stuck in this hole and I told them not to worry because I knew you'd rescue me and when you found me you'd find all of us. You always told me that no matter what happened you'd be there for me. **I knew you'd do it and you did.**”

Having a lifelong commitment to one's children is like that, no matter what happens we have to be there for them.

Today is Father's Day--a day of celebration. Today is a wonderful day to allow our children to indulge us. I was thinking that this afternoon would be a good time to hit the recliner and have one of my daughter's fan me while the other one fed me grapes...

Enjoy this day as a day of celebration. But let each of us challenge ourselves and each other to grow as parents:

- ◆ To teach our children to live Godly lives by living Godly lives ourselves.
- ◆ To make sacrifices gladly for our children;
- ◆ Finally to make sure we have lifelong commitments to our children.