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In Favour of Fatherhood.

Today, we pause in our series based on John's letters to celebrate Father's Day. And before we go any further let's include grandfather's as part of our celebration.

After all, without grandfather's there would be no father's so let's be inclusive this morning and celebrate them as well.

So, where and when did this tradition of a special day for fathers begin?

Well, as with many things, history can be somewhat foggy and imprecise. For example, in the United States there are two possible origins for Father's Day but we will only consider one this morning.

According to some accounts, the first Father's Day was celebrated in Washington state on June 19, 1910.

A woman by the name of Sonora Smart Dodd came up with the idea of honoring and celebrating her father while listening to a Mother's Day sermon at church in 1909.

She felt as though mothers were getting all the acclaim while fathers were equally deserving of a day of praise (She would probably be displeased that Mother's Day still gets the lion's share of attention).

Sonora's dad was quite a man. William Smart, a veteran of the Civil War, was left a widower when his wife died while giving birth to their sixth child. He went on to raise the six children by himself on their small farm in Washington.

To show her appreciation for all the hard work and love William gave to her and her siblings, Sonora thought there should be a day to pay homage to him and other dads like him.

She initially suggested June 5th, the anniversary of her father's death to be the designated day to celebrate Father's Day, but due to some bad planning, the celebration in Spokane, Washington was deferred to the third Sunday in June.

And it would appear that the tradition would eventually spill over into Canada and so we like the US have come to recognize the third Sunday in June as a day to honour fatherhood and grand fatherhood.

So why set aside a special day to honour our fathers and grandfathers? Can we not just be

thankful for them and appreciate them on an ongoing basis?

Well, we certainly should do that and I admit that when I was considering what to select for today's message I was tempted to carry on with our journey with John through his letters.

But on further consideration I decided that it is both appropriate and important to pause for this week to honour and celebrate fathers and grandfathers.

We should do this because fathers and grandfathers are important in many ways.

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First, because they play a critical role for God's plan for society.

Let's consider Psalm 127 verse one:

*Unless the LORD builds a house,
the work of the builders is wasted.
Unless the LORD protects a city,
guarding it with sentries will do no good.*

Now while the words imply that the Psalmist is speaking about a physical house, or an earthly residence I believe that he is really putting forth a principle that can be applied in a variety of ways in our everyday life.

For example, if the Lord is not with us in our attempts to plant or grow a church we do in fact labour in vain.

So, I believe that this principle can be applied to a variety of ‘houses’ and the one I would like you to consider this morning would be the word ‘household’.

I think then that we could say with the Psalmist that unless the Lord builds a ‘household’ we are attempting parenting in this challenging age that might well be labouring in vain.

A second key point for our consideration with respect to fatherhood is that husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, were and still are, the key elements of God’s plans for the building blocks of society.

When we go right back to the book of beginnings, the book of Genesis we see that God created a man and a woman as the first family unit.

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Beginning in Genesis Chapter one verses twenty seven and twenty eight (NLT)) we read this...

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it.

So, we see that God’s plan to populate the earth, to grow a healthy and godly society, or a healthy and godly households was through what has become known as the traditional or nuclear family.

Now there are countless examples throughout scripture where individuals chose to move away from the nuclear God ordained plan to a variety of other family configurations often with disastrous results.

Now last week in our message from John’s letter’s we pointed out that there are really only two kingdoms, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness.

And Satan who heads up the kingdom of darkness is the enemy of God and wishes to destroy anything that God values.

So, you can be sure he will be doing everything in his power to prevent strong households being built in alignment with God's plans.

Now before we go any further, I want to point out that bad stuff happens in life. People are free will agents, some make mistakes, some are hurtful and harm people they once claimed to love in a variety of ways.

Bad stuff happens and sometimes the ideal nuclear family is shattered. But God is still able to come along side of those who are determined to serve him in spite of the bad stuff.

He is able to bring peace, restoration, and healing to those who find themselves parenting in less than an ideal nuclear configuration.

Now let's think about why God's plan for a nuclear family, a family with a father is important.

If you are a father or a grandfather, consider how important your role and influence is in the life of a child.

Dr. David Popenoe, Professor of Sociology at Rutgers University and Co-Director of the National Marriage Project, writes this in general about the importance of fathers:

Fathers are far more than just “second adults” in the home. Involved fathers – especially biological fathers – bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring. They provide protection and economic support and male role models. They have a parenting style that is significantly different from that of a mother and that difference is important in healthy child development.

Now let’s look at little more specifically at the importance of fatherhood, or the lack of fatherhood can have in the life of a child:

First, 82% of studies on father involvement and child well-being published since 1980 found “significant associations between positive father involvement and offspring well-being.

Conclusion: Fatherhood is important and fatherhood matters.

Secondly, In an analysis of over 100 studies on parent-child relationships, it was found that having a loving and nurturing father was as important for a child’s happiness, well-being, and social and academic success as having a loving and nurturing mother. Some studies even indicated father-love was a stronger contributor to some important positive child well-being outcomes.

Thirdly, According to child psychiatrist Kyle Pruett, a father's more active play style and comparatively slower response to a toddler or infant experiencing frustration serve to promote problem-solving competencies and independence in the child.

Fourthly, Research from the University of Pennsylvania indicates that children who feel a closeness and warmth with their father are twice as likely to enter college, 75 percent less likely to have a child in their teen years, 80 percent less likely to be incarcerated and half as likely to show various signs of depression.

Fatherhood is important and fatherhood matters.

Fifthly, In a 26-year-long study, researchers found that the number one factor in developing empathy in children was father involvement. Fathers spending regular time alone with their children translated into children who became compassionate adults.

Sixthly, The US health and services department says that Female-led homes with no spouse present had an alarming poverty rate of 47.6% in 2011 — more than four times the rate for kids living in families where both parents are present.

Poverty leads to less education access, often to minor theft and unfortunately all too frequently ly to really serious stuff like gang membership.

Bottom line is that children growing up without the influence of Fathers have a much higher chance of having significant issues.

So, fatherhood matters and fatherhood is important.

Now if the lack of fatherhood influence in the raising of children has the potential for major problem for the children and for society at large then one would hope that the incidence of such is quite small.

But it is not.

So how many are there?

In Canada: Stats Can says that 12.8 per cent of Canadian children live in fatherless homes.

In the United Kingdom: twenty percent of children live in fatherless homes.

In US Seven million dads are absent from the life of their children.

I think you can see that these kind of numbers suggest that there is significant potential for huge numbers of children growing up with significant developmental problems and challenges for themselves and society at large.

If you follow the news at all you probably realize that crime rates are up right across North America. I wonder why.

Mass shootings in the US seem to be a weekly occurrence.

Can it be that at least a part of the problem is due to the decline in strong loving fatherhood?

Drug use and the number of deaths from drug use among young people is alarming.

In Canada there was a total of 26,690 apparent opioid toxicity deaths between January 2016 and September 2021.

Suicides among North American youth is a major problem.

Is it any wonder the enemy loves to see the demise of the nuclear family?

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So what can be done about it?

Proverbs 22:6 (NLT) says;

Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.

Words are important. Scripture based teaching is important. Christian nuclear families will still face many challenges in this troubled world but they stand the best chance of denying our enemy the destruction of our children.

So, fathers need to be versed in the word, and ensuring that their children have excellent Christian based training.

But I think this verse is speaking about much more than words, words of correction or words of direction.

I think the most powerful agent of direction is the influence of a parent followed closely by the influence of a grandparent.

How you live as a father or grandfather influences the direction your children will take.

For example, if a child grows up in a home where the father is present but not interested matters of faith, not interested in studying the word or going to church it is much more likely that his children will at some time drift away from the faith as well.

So Fathers and Grandfathers think about the way you live, the way, you talk, your commitment to the things of the Lord are influencing your children

What are some of the ways you can influence positively?

There are many and here are just a couple.

First of all, remember God's first building block. A husband and a wife. Strong loving godly marriages make for strong loving godly homes.

Strong loving godly homes give children the best chance to become the next godly generation, the next building block of society with strong loving homes.

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Writing about love Paul says in Ephesians 5:25 (NLT):

“For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.”

The Greek word ‘eklesia’ translated as ‘church’ in the New Testament did not refer to a building or an organization.

It referred to the gathering of people who had chosen to become followers of Jesus. People like us.

Paul was reminding these believers like us, that Jesus loved us so much, those of us who have chosen to follow him that he gave his life for us and that this is the kind of love required by the Christian husband for his wife.

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Paul goes on to say in verse twenty eight:
(NLT)

“husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself.”

A loving husband is the first step to a loving home, A critical step in godly fatherhood.

Husbands love your wives, grandfathers, encourage and support you children in building and sustaining strong marriages.

So, what can we do about the challenges of Fatherhood?

Consider your influence.

What your children see in the life of their father will influence their approach to life as well.

A child who sees his father leave his mother behind to fend for herself and struggle with poverty will be much more likely to leave his family some day than a child who grows up with a father determined to stick with his family through thick and thin.

A child who sees a father determined to work hard to provide his wife and family with a decent standard of living will influence his children to do the same.

For example, my father was a hard worker, from early morning farm chores at six, to the completion of farm chores around eight in the evening seven days a week. Hard work.

His life painted a picture of hard work and a commitment to the Biblical principle of providing for his family.

Dad and people like must have liked Proverbs 6:6.
In the NLT it reads:

*Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones.
Learn from their ways and become wise! Though
they have no prince or governor or ruler to make
them work they labor hard all summer, gathering
food for the winter. But you, lazybones, how long
will you sleep? When will you wake up? A little
extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of
the hands to rest— then poverty will pounce on you
like a bandit;*

His work ethic influenced my life. We were
not wealthy but we were provided for. The
temptations that poverty would have brought were
neutralized.

With our current levels of inflation managing
that family budget is more difficult than ever. Dads
who are determined to ensure their family has
adequate provision will insulate against the enemies
desire to use poverty to entrap children and moms
alike.

Fathers and Grandfathers invest wisely. Time
is a limited resource. You only have so much.

Be generous invest your time in your children
and grandchildren. Influence them for the Kingdom.

Fatherhood is important. It matters.

And lastly enlist the help of the Lord. Your role as a father or grandfather is important.

Performing that role in our broken world is a difficult task. Enlist the help of the Lord.

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Psalm 127 1: (NLT)

Unless the LORD builds a house,
the work of the builders is wasted.
Unless the LORD protects a city,
guarding it with sentries will do no good.

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