

I came across a Father's Day card which said on the outside: "Dad, today children across the land are honouring their fathers". On the inside it said "tomorrow it's back to normal!" The card implied that normally fathers shouldn't expect to receive too much honour and sadly that's often how it is in many families. A lot is expected of dads these days – to provide money, security and strength, to fix what's broken, to show some spine yet be sensitive and caring. Sometimes fathers, like mothers feel used, criticised and unloved. No wonder they retreat to the shed or the golf course! And unfortunately some dads don't deserve much honour from their kids.

**"Honour your father"** God's 4<sup>th</sup> commandment says (Exodus 20:12) and St Paul echoes it in Ephesians 6:2. We need to hear God's words on this Father's Day and every day whether we have a father, are a father, or care about families who do. This commandment is the only one with a promise attached **"that it may go well with you and you may live long in the land"**. God attaches his blessing to the honouring of parents. And come to think of it things do go better in my house when I feel honoured, and believe me the wheels fall off quickly when I am not!

"Honour" is a word normally reserved for God in the Bible. It means to "lift up", "glorify", "respect" or "exalt". Now as a dad I don't expect to be exalted or glorified, a bit of plain old respect will do! God seems to know that one of a man's basic needs is respect, from his wife and from his kids, in fact from anyone! If we don't feel respected it's hard to have self respect and men get into all kinds of trouble because of it. Listen to what Martin Luther said about honouring our fathers in the old Catechism:

*"Parents stand in for God, and no matter how humble, poor, frail and odd they may be, they are a father and mother given by God..." "We should look on them as having the highest status after God". He says to honour them means being "respectful to the royalty hidden in our parents".*

Did you get that? The honour we give to our fathers, as imperfect as they may be, we are giving to God. We are meant to see beyond the man, to our heavenly Father himself!

So how can we honour our earthly fathers and thereby honour our heavenly father?

## 1. We honour fathers by the kind of life that brings them joy and not heartache.

One of the proverbs says: **"A wise son brings joy to his father"** (Proverbs 10:1)  
Another says **"A foolish son brings grief to his father"** (Proverbs 17:25)

The Bible is full of examples of children who dishonoured their fathers by the way they lived. Cain killed his own brother Abel. Jacob pulled a swifty on his blind old dad Isaac. Jacob's own sons shoved his favourite in a pit and sold him, and pretended he was killed by wild animals. A priest named Eli had sons who were having sex with the female ushers in the temple! Absalom tried to get the throne of his father King David. Jesus told a story about a son who wanted his inheritance before his father had died! Fathers dishonoured by the things their kids did. The whole Bible is about all God's children dishonouring him by their lives and the way they treat him, but it is also about a heavenly Father who still loves us despite our disobedience.

We often don't realise how much power we have as children to bring either joy or pain to our parents by the way we live. We often don't consider the impact on them at all. But many of us carry our father's name and whether he is alive or not we honour or dishonour his name by the way we live with his name, and especially by the way we speak to and about him, and the way we react and respond to him. We either bring joy or grief, honour or dishonour to him and thereby to our heavenly Father as well.

## 2. We honour fathers by listening to their wisdom.

Do I hear you thinking "what wisdom?" The world says the wisdom of anyone over 40 is redundant. What child hasn't thought they know more than their father. Proverbs 13:1 says **"a wise son pays attention when his father corrects him, but an arrogant person never admits he is wrong"**. Proverbs 1:8 says **"Listen, my son, to your father's instruction.."**

We dads are not known to be good listeners, but then neither are children. A Christian honours their father by listening to the advice and wisdom they have accumulated from God. It doesn't mean we will always buy

it as we grow up ourselves but we can at least honour them by listening and trying to understand why they think the way they do. That includes our elderly fathers who have much to say but often no one is listening. Our elderly fathers particularly can feel redundant. They can't do what they used to do with their bodies and no one is listening to what's on their minds. They can easily feel worthless and depressed. You can honour an elderly father just by giving them your ears, something we are often too busy to do. We can also honour them by admitting where we have gone wrong in life rather than making excuses, just as we do for our heavenly Father.

### 3. We honour fathers by forgiving them.

Most of us fathers live with a lot of guilt over the things we have said and done, our anger, our absence from home, our failure to listen and spend time, all the things we have not done and should have and the things we wished we had not said or done. The greatest honour we can bestow on our fathers is to forgive them, whether they deserve it or not, because that is how our heavenly Father treats us. In the Bible Noah's kids once found him lying drunk and stark naked in his tent. One son came out and told the others to come and have a laugh at the old man's expense. The other sons came and covered up their dad's shame. They were not going to parade their dad's shortcomings(?) to everyone. Maybe you are ashamed of your dad for some good reason. Maybe he has been a big disappointment or embarrassment to you and not what God wanted him to be in your life. You are not responsible for that – he is, but you are responsible for how you react to even a poor example of a father, and God asks you to forgive him, to cover his sins as Christ died for and covers all our sins. Maybe as Jesus encourages we might have to confront our dads about some things and maybe it will take time but reconciling must be our aim with God's help and in that way you will honour your heavenly Father who sent his Son to die for you and your imperfect father. Forgiveness is the best Fathers' day gift of all.

#### Now a brief word to fathers.....

Fathers, God commands our children to honour us, whether we deserve it or not. We don't need to make that harder than it already is for them to do. Ephesians 6:4 says "**Fathers do not exasperate your children, instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord**". It is all too easy for a father to frustrate and lead his children to anger for all sorts of reasons. We can all think of how our fathers' behaviour has led us to become angry, and frustrated. I guess we need God's help to soften us a bit sometimes and open us up to our children and not be too hard on them so that we crush their spirits. That doesn't mean we can be perfect. In fact the most important thing a father can teach his children about God is to live by forgiveness himself and to ask for and offer it to his children. As a child I can still remember seeing my dad confess his sins in church with everyone else, and I knew what some of them were! And I remember how being forgiven in church led to a change in the flavour at home.

These days it's not easy to teach our kids the faith in the home, sometimes we can't say too much, but they can sure read us like a book. Our children need to see we are listening both to God and to them. We can take the lead in hearing God's word in church and at home so we don't have to say "ask your mother" when children ask "God questions". We can show them we want to grow in understanding and doing God's will in our lives. And we can listen to our children – their needs, hopes, and disappointments. A little girl came up to her dad and was talking so fast that she was tripping over her words. "Talk more slowly!" her dad said gruffly, to which his daughter replied "only if you promise to listen more slowly". She wasn't sure she could keep his attention long enough to say what she really wanted. Father's if we want honour, maybe we need to listen first and give advice second. I remember a father telling me that he had said to his son that he was sorry he couldn't give his family some of the things other dads could afford. His son had replied "You were there for me and you listened to me and you valued me, that's all I wanted." The dad said he felt about 10 feet tall. He felt honoured.

Honour is something God commands, but it is something we fathers can make easier or harder for our children to give.

Today children around the world are doing what God wants – honouring their fathers. Tomorrow may that be normal.