

“Let’s Be GREAT Fathers”

Father’s Day, 2021

Asbury UMC, Waterford, PA

It is an honor and a pleasure to be worshipping with you, and sharing the message with you, today. This is about the 5th time that my wife, Jan, and I have worshipped with you in this beautiful sanctuary, so full of light, so tall, so historic. We have always enjoyed coming here. And, on a personal note, thank you for how you have loved our daughter and Dustin these past two years. You know, it’s a special relationship between a pastor and their first church, and you can never duplicate your first appointment out of seminary. I often think about the three churches that our Bishop appointed me to, way back in 1983 BPC. (You know what BPC is, right? Before Personal Computers – back when I hand wrote my sermons and made bulletins on Saturday nights, on a very leaky, hand-cranked, mimeograph machine.) I often think of those three churches, (which are a 2 and ½ hour drive due east of here, in Potter County), and how they loved their “right out of seminary” pastor, teaching me what “real” ministry looks like. You are doing the same for Tori. And you are doing it really, really, well. And I just wanted to tell you that.

By the way, I told my friend, Jay, (when we were golfing this past Monday), that I would be preaching here today. And he told me, “That’s great. After hearing you preach, they’ll like Tori’s preaching even more!”

I asked him to pose for this picture on the 14th tee box where that encouraging statement was made, to commemorate that moment forever – because I’m pretty sure he was right.

I have known Tori since 1996. She was just 4 years old when I was sent to Grace UMC on the Washington District. I was told later that she didn’t like men with beards. But for some reason she didn’t mind me. (And I think she married a guy with a beard too, didn’t she?) By God’s grace, Tori and I hit it off right away 25 years ago. She was always the first one to race forward for the children’s message – always sat right next to me, always had her hand up first. And, because of the involvement of her mom and her grandfather at our church, no 4 year old was at our church more than her. I loved watching Tori grow up. As her pastor, I buried her cat in their backyard when it died, after conducting my first “cat funeral”. I listened to her mom a lot when Tori got her first boyfriend. I remember the day that Tori stepped across the line of faith and became a Christian, just like it was yesterday. And 12 years ago, after Jan and I were married in the “other Asbury” church on your District, (the one by the airport), it was my pleasure to become Tori’s step dad.

What's it mean to be a dad, or a step-dad, or a grandfather today? On this Father's Day, I'd like us to look at what it takes to be a good dad. That's not quite right. I want to look with you at what it takes to be a GREAT father, step-father and grandfather today?

While he was President, Abraham Lincoln would often go to New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, in Washington. The pastor there was Dr. Phineas Gurley, one of the best preachers of his day. One evening, while walking back to the White House from services, an aide asked the President what he thought of the sermon. Lincoln said, "The content was excellent, and he delivered it with eloquence. He had put work into the message." The aide asked, "Then you thought it was a great sermon?" "No, no," said the President. "Dr. Gurley forgot one thing to make it a 'great sermon'. He forgot to ask us to do something great."

I think President Lincoln was right. Great sermons asks us, or inspires us, to do great things.

Today I want to ask all of we fathers, step-fathers and grandfathers, to do a something great. That is, to be great. To that end, I want to share with you what I think are five keys to being great fathers and grandfathers.

The first key comes from the last part of the scripture reading we just heard, in Ephesians 6:4 - "***Fathers . . . bring (your children) up in the training and instruction of the Lord.***"

The first key to being a great father and grandfather is this: A great father helps his children grow into strong Christians. This should come naturally to us. After all, we're active in all of the other kinds of growth that our kids do. We're active in the intellectual growth of our children - so we help our kids with their homework. We're involved in the social, or athletic, development of our kids - so we're at our kids' games, maybe we even coach their soccer, baseball, or basketball teams. Why? Because we know good fathers are active in all of the kinds of growth that our kids need to do.

Now, do you want to be a GREAT father, and grandfather? Then take it to the next level. Be active in your kids and grandkids spiritual growth. And that means, first of all, that GREAT fathers and grandfathers are genuine Christians themselves - that you believe Jesus died for your sins on the cross, and that you have given control of your life over to him. For when a child sees that faith in their dads, and granddads, it's contagious. Study after study shows that kids are way more likely to become Christians if they see their fathers living out their Christian faith. Yes, it has a huge impact if kids see their moms being Christians. But for kids who have dads at home, if they see their dads going to church, see their dads going to Sunday School, see their dads praying at the dinner table, see their dads

reading their Bible - wow, the odds go up incredibly high that those kids will become and remain disciples of Jesus Christ themselves. The statistics all bear that out.

Dads, do you know the impact you have on your kids' faith development? It's huge! So, in your house, who makes sure that your kids are getting dressed and ready on time to come to church? If you do it then that sends a message to your kids that says, "Church must be really important. Dad is insisting that we go." In your house, dad, when you are the one who's excited to come here to Sunday School, or the one who talks positively about our faith, or who happily shares something new that you just discovered in the Bible, whew, your kids understand, "Jesus isn't optional in our home. He's the center of our lives, because he's the center of my dad's life."

Great fathers, and grandfathers, take an active part in the faith development of their children and grandchildren.

Second, a great father and grandfather looks for and uses teachable moments. "Teachable moments" those unplanned, spontaneous times when your child is so open to learning something new that no matter what you say to them, it's gonna stick in their minds forever.

You're walking to your car with your child. And they see a bird that's died, lying in the yard. "Daddy, why did that bird die?" they ask you. That's a teachable moment. You didn't plan it. God just plopped it in front of you. What will you do with it? What you say right then will stick in your child, (or grandchild's) mind, and become a part of what forms them into who they are. And you have a choice. You can either blow it, and say something trite, like, "Everything dies. Come on. We gotta go." That's what average, dads do. They either think that they don't have the time to be creative with their answer, or they're too blind to see that it is a teachable moment. But a great dad sees this moment for what it is - a chance to shape their child. So they seize that moment in front of a dead bird to talk about life and death, to talk about how we all die, and to talk about how God waits for his children with open arms in heaven, when we die. What's happening there? You're teaching your child not to fear death because God is real, and heaven is real. I don't mean we go into some deep, long, philosophical discussion about death and dying. I mean, we talk about it on their level. Short and sweet. But meaningful. They're asking you about death. What will you tell them? What will you teach them?

Or, you and your grandchild are at Presque Isle at the end of a great day and see the sun set. And it's beautiful. Even a child knows it's beautiful. Do you let that moment go by, without talking about the God who painted the sky and made that sunset? No. You want to be a great grandfather. So you point to the setting

sun and say something simple like, “Didn’t God do a great job when he made that?” And that simple comment plants the thought into your child’s mind, “Beauty in nature equals God.”

Or, you’re on vacation this summer, over a weekend. It’s Saturday night and you’re planning your activities for the next day, Sunday. It’s Saturday night. You’re in a strange town, on vacation. Dad, what will your family be doing in the morning? You’re on vacation! But do you make sure that your family goes to worship somewhere the next morning? Do you see that as a teachable moment? What you decide about finding a church to worship in while you’re on vacation either teaches your kids either, “Worship isn’t that important, so we can skip it when we’re on vacation,” or it teaches them, “Worship is so important we do it even on vacation!”

Great fathers and grandfathers look for and use teachable moments, to shape their children.

Third, a great father and grandfather sees himself as a Christian role model. In other words, they’re not afraid to say, (without saying it), “Child, do you want to know how to live in this world? I’ll show you how to live. Just watch me.”

Not everyone agrees with this, however. When I was a teen-ager, there was a really popular writer that everyone was ga ga over, named Kahlil Gibran. Were any of you ever exposed to his nonsense? Kahlil Gibran wrote a book called The Prophet that was all the rage when I was 15, or 16. It seemed like everyone was reading it.

Well, I read a quote from The Prophet the other day that (I think) explains a lot about why so many of my generation were so bad at parenting. Kahlil Gibran wrote this, “*You may strive to be like your children, but seek not to make them like you.*”

Can you believe that?

“*You may strive to be like your children, but seek not to make them like you.*”

This is exactly what’s wrong with so many parents of my generation. We grew up on hogwash like this! We were told, “Let your child find himself. Don’t talk about your values with them. Let them discover for themselves who they are.”

I’m sorry. Parents feed their children. We understand that on the physical level, don’t we? I mean, imagine a parent who told their three year old, “You don’t have to eat today, Johnny. In fact, you don’t have to eat any day. And if you decide to eat, you can have whatever you want. You decide. You need to discover for yourself what’s best for you.”

Are we going to do that? No! We put parents away who don’t feed their kids physically.

So, why are we so hesitant to feed our children spiritually and morally? Great fathers and grandfathers (as well as great mothers and grandmothers), know that they are Christian role models. And they welcome it. They know their kids are watching them, to see how a Christian lives in this world – and they’re up for the challenge! For a parent to say, “Don’t be like me. I’m not a good enough role model. You need to find your own way,” isn’t helping that child at all.

Great fathers embrace the privilege of being great role models.

Patricia Fripp writes of a sunny Saturday afternoon, in Oklahoma City, when her friend, Bobby Lewis, took his two boys to play putt putt golf.

“How much to play?” he asked the guy at the ticket counter.

“\$3.00 for you, and for any kid six and up. Under six is free,” said the guy. “How old are your children?”

“One is 10 and the other's 7,” the dad said. “I guess I owe you \$3.00 for each of us. Nine bucks.”

The man behind the counter was surprised. “You could have told me that the younger one was 6, and saved three bucks. I wouldn’t have known the difference.”

And Bobby Lewis said, “That may be true. But my kids would have known the difference.”

I’d like to meet this Bobby Lewis. He knows a teachable moment when he sees one. He also knows that he's a role model to his kids, and he embraces it. It's okay with him that his kids are always watching, always have their antennas up, asking themselves, "How is dad going to handle this situation?"

Great fathers and grandfathers see themselves as Christian role models for their kids. The message they’re sending their children is this, “Live like me.”

We see that message, by the way, in two verses that Paul wrote in another one of his letters. Twice in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote these words: “*Mimetai mou ginesthe*”.

Mimetai – a plural noun that means “imitators”

mou – first person singular possessive pronoun, meaning “of me”, or “my”

ginesthe – second person plural verb that means “ya’ll become”

Put these three words together and you get Paul issuing this amazing command, found in both 1Corinthians 4:16 and 1Corinthians 11:1 - “Ya’ll become imitators of me”. (*“Mimetai mou ginesthe”*)

Wow. That takes hutzpah, doesn’t it?

Dads, are you ready to tell your kids what the apostle Paul told the Corinthians: “Ya’ll become imitators of me. Watch how I live and copy it”?

Granddads, are you ready to tell your grandchildren, “Become imitators of me. Let me show you how a real Christian lives”?

Great fathers and grandfathers see themselves as Christian role models for their kids.

Fourth, back to what Paul wrote to the Ephesians. Look at the first part of verse 4 - ***“Fathers, do not exasperate your children.”***

What’s that mean? Again, it always helps to go to the language in which Paul wrote, which used to mean you had to take NT Greek classes. Yuck. But now you can do it on a website called BibleHub.com by clicking on the Greek words in the verse and learning all about them. So much fun!

Going there, (to Ephesians 6:4), you’ll see by the letters in red that the literal English translation is, “And fathers not provoke the children of you.”

We’re interested in the main verb of that sentence, which in Greek is the fancy word *“parorgizete”*. And if you were to click on that Greek word in the BibleHub app (which you can download to your computer, or to your phone), you’d discover that it’s from the root word *“orgizo”* which means “to make angry”. Paul was telling the fathers in Ephesus not to tick their kids off, as they’re bringing them up to love the Lord! Isn’t that great? Did you know that was in the Bible?

“Don’t *parorgizete* your kids!” Paul was saying. Don’t make them angry.

Putting it in a positive way, I think what Paul was getting at is this: A great father and grandfather encourages his children.

Dads, are you an encourager of your children? Or, do you tick them off with your constant and discouraging criticism?

So . . . I was in WalMart the other day, that amazing source of sermon illustrations. On my way in, I found myself walking behind a dad and his son. And the dad was all over that kid:

"Hey, stand up straight when you walk. Don't touch that garbage can. Did you have to wear that shirt? Come on, hurry up."

I couldn't believe it. I looked at that boy and thought, "Now there's a child who's *parorgizete*-d if I've ever seen one!"

Then, in the hardware section, I was walking behind another dad who was there with his daughter. She was probably 3 years old. And you know how 3 year olds sometime talk a lot? Well, this 3 year old was talking up a storm. And that father, (who was obviously busy looking for some nuts or bolts), was so patient with her. She'd be asking him what this was, and what that was, and why he needed it, and what he'd be doing with it. And he'd say things to her like, "You're

so smart to ask that question. Remember when we changed the light bulb yesterday? You did such a good job with that. You're my little helper, aren't you? I'm so glad you're with me today."

I FOLLOWED THAT DAD FOR 6 AISLES!!!

I wanted to give him an award!

“Fathers, do not exasperate [or make angry] your children.” In other words, encourage your children. They don't point out their every flaw. Instead, give them courage to try new things, and bravery to go against the odds. Give them the freedom to fail, because they know that we won't criticize them for trying something new. And if they fail, encouragement means to pick them up, dust them off, and send them back into the game - because they know that with you, trying and failing is OK.

A great father and grandfather encourages, (gives heart and confidence to), his kids no matter what.

Finally, isn't it true that a great father or grandfather tells his children that he loves them - often! The days of the silent father who never shares his feelings are over. Today, good fathers love their children, yes. But great fathers tell their kids that they love them - often!

I'd like to end with this parable, by Patty Hansen, about a great father, and his daughter:

Once upon a time there was a great man who married the woman of his dreams. With their love, they created a little girl. She was a bright and cheerful little girl, and the great man loved her very much.

When she was very little, he would pick her up, hum a tune and dance with her around the room. And he would tell her, “I love you, little girl.”

When the little girl was growing up, the great man would hug her and tell her, “I love you, little girl.” The little girl would pout and say, “I'm not a little girl anymore.” Then the man would laugh and say, “But to me, you'll always be my little girl.”

The little girl (who was not little anymore) left her home, and went into the world. As she learned more about herself, she learned more about the man. She saw that he truly was great and strong, for now she recognized his strengths. One of his strengths was his ability to express his love to his family. It didn't matter where she went in the world, the man would call her and say, “I love you, little girl.”

The day came when the little girl (who was not little anymore) received a phone call. The great man was damaged. He had had a stroke. He couldn't talk

anymore, and they weren't sure that he could understand the words spoken to him. He could no longer smile, laugh, walk, hug, dance or tell the little girl (who was not little anymore) that he loved her.

And so she went to the side of the great man. When she walked into the room and saw him, he looked small and not strong at all. He looked at her and tried to speak, but he could not.

The little girl did the only thing she could do. She climbed up on the bed next to the great man. Tears ran from both of their eyes and she drew her arms around the useless shoulders of her father.

Her head on his chest, she thought of many things. She remembered the wonderful times together and how she had always felt protected and cherished by the great man. She felt grief for the loss she was to endure, the words of love [that she would never hear again] that had comforted her.

And then she heard from within the man, the beat of his heart. The heart where the music and the words had always lived. The heart beat on - steadily unconcerned about the damage to the rest of his body. And while she rested there, it happened. She heard what she needed to hear.

His heart beat out the words that his mouth could no longer say:
I love you - I love you - I love you,
little girl - little girl - little girl.

(From Chicken Soup For The Soul, pp. 8-9.)

A great father and grandfather:

- Tells his children that he loves them - often!
- Encourages his kids way more than he criticizes them to the point of making them angry.
- Lives as a Christian role model to them.
- Looks for, and uses, teachable moments, to shape his children into believers in God forever.
- Helps his children grow into strong Christians.

Men, thank you for the influence that you are providing to the next generation. This is your day! May we all be, with God's help, not just good, not just average, but may we all be great fathers and grandfathers.

Let's pray –