

20260906 O may all who come behind us find us faithful

Dr John Tan

Well, it has fallen on my shoulders to take us through a consideration of what a goodly and godly father should be, and I cannot say that this is something that I am all that qualified for. I have never had a human father figure in my life. Even after I had become a Christian, on the occasions that I felt that the Lord was speaking to me, I would hear Him say 'child' rather than call me by my name. When I was about 18, I complained to the Lord that instead of referring to me as 'child' that perhaps He could call me by my name instead. I still remember the spot where I was in, in a room in Glasgow, Scotland, when I felt the Lord say that the reason He called me child was because He is my father, as I have never had a father figure in my life. That was a time of change for me! (Incidentally, on the day that I started preparing for this message in earnest, my reading for that day was from 2 Corinthians 6 where verse 18 said: I will be a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty).

Given that I have never really had a father figure, how then should I talk about being a father? Well, I guess a lot of this comes from observing and experimenting – observing others (looking at the good, the bad and the ugly sides of fatherhood) and experimenting with my own form of fatherhood.

I would therefore like to look at the matter from three perspectives. These are as follows:

- How the world defines fatherhood success
- How Scripture defines fatherhood success
- Faithful fatherhood

How does the world define fatherhood success?

Many people in the world define the success of a father by how much money that father might have and thus be able to leave for his children. As a result of this belief, we have many fathers today whose main pursuit in life is for the bigger house, for a greater number of properties, for bigger and more expensive cars, and for all the trinkets and the ornaments of success and wealth.

In the movie 'The Fiddler on the Roof' Tevye sings the song 'If I were a rich man'. The words go something like this, and here I must say that I have truncated the song, and if you listen to the whole song, you can

see that one of the things that Tevye used to measure his rating as a father (or the level of his success as a father) would have been wealth.

But the truth is that there have been many examples of people whose success as fathers have been actually spoiled and hindered by this wealth for they spend too much time chasing that wealth, then protecting it, until they discover, too late, that this wealth did not help them grow any closer to their earthly family or for that matter, to their heavenly father. Such fathers are often absent because all they do is work to amass even more money, and they parent by proxy, using nannies and childminders, and think that as long as they provide for their kids financially that this would substitute for authentic attention and emotional validation. And often such children grow up thinking that they are entitled to everything and anything that they want. J. Paul Getty would be a prime example of a rich man who was a poor father. He put money above all else, so much so that when his grandson was kidnapped, he refused to pay the ransom. He compelled his family to beg for his money, and he could make his family members fight for his attention and financial support. In fact, his sons struggled with addiction and were miserable people.

I think that we should often remind ourselves of the words of Epictetus a Greek philosopher, who said that ‘wealth consists not in having great concessions, but in having few wants.’ And of those few wants should be to want to relate to our children in a meaningful manner.

Some define their success as a father by the honors that they have received – if I get this honor or that title or this recognition, people will look at me and see how wonderful I am as an icon of the family.

But the problem with these is that we are attaching worth to something that is extrinsic. What these people are really doing is creating a false standard where worth is measured by public praise, where the focus is on work rather than being with the children, where real people connections are missed; this is because of the constant desire to be in the limelight.

Ultimately, substituting active fatherhood for wealth and titles hurt the children as money cannot replace a father’s time with and genuine love for the children.

Let’s move on to the next perspective which is

How Scripture defines fatherhood success

I have made a list of some of the characteristics that the Bible says that a godly father should have, but will go through this list rather quickly and only concentrate on just a few:

- A godly father is one who is able to teach God's word to his children (Deuteronomy 11:19). Of course, in order to be able to teach God's laws to our children, we must learn these precepts and values first.
- A godly father prays for, and with his family – a very clear example of this in Job 1:5
- A godly father is one who can discipline with love (Proverbs 3:11 – 12; Ephesians 6:4)
- A godly father is one who can provide for the family (Proverbs 13:22, Matthew 7:9 – 11)
- A godly father is one who reflects God's love and therefore is able to lead by example (Proverbs 20:7, 22:6).
- A godly father is one who is able to give loving instructions (Proverbs 4:1 – 4, Ephesians 6:4)
- A godly father is one who is an encourager, a protector and a mentor
- A godly father is one who loves the mother.

The list is a lot longer than this, but I have just highlighted a few of them as time does not permit a full discourse of all the characteristics of a goodly father. This leads us to the final section of my sharing this morning, which is the crux of the message.

Faithful fatherhood

I have three kids of my own – wonderful children that my wife and I are tremendously proud of and blessed by. And yes, as children they used to fight over who would do the dishes after meals, except that their 'fight' would take on a different tone. They would 'fight' to do the dishes for the other person because 'well, you did it last night'. Even now despite the fact that they are all married and have their own families, they can still spend hours talking with each other and they love each other very much. One of the things that we used to do with the children when they were very young was that we would take them out, one at a time, for a night drive. So, Monday would be the night for the son, Wednesday would be for the first daughter

and so on. That was something that they found just so important and precious. And of course, my dear wife made this possible for she looked after the other two at home while I was out with the one child on his or her particular night.

For us as Christians, there is yet one more dimension to fatherhood. The first is that of being the natural, biological fathers to our children. The second is that of becoming spiritual fathers to the people that we have brought (or will bring) to the Lord.

I want to end this sharing about fatherhood by bringing your attention to the words of this song. The song is called 'Find us faithful' and the words of the second verse go like this:

After all our hopes and dreams have come and gone
 And our children sift through all we've left behind
 May the clues that they discover and the memories they uncover
 Become the light that leads them to the road we each must find

O may all who come behind us find us faithful
 May the fire of our devotion light their way
 And may the footprints that we leave
 Lead them to believe
 And the lives we live inspire them to obey
 O may all who come behind us find us faithful

Our prayer, and by 'our' I mean my wife and I, is that when our children sift through the memories and think of us (now or in the future), is that they would find us faithful and that the things that we have done for them as father and mother will lead them and inspire them to love, obey and serve the Lord all the more.