

What Dads Can Learn From God the Father

By Stephen Gabriel

On Trinity Sunday and Father's Day, a reflection on how dads on earth should model themselves after our loving Father in heaven

For this reason I bend my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth receives its name. – Eph 3:14-15

Jesus referred to the First Person of the Blessed Trinity as the Father. And we continue to refer to Him as the Father – not because he is male, for God has no gender, but because Our Lord chose to use that term. He must have felt it was most helpful for us to think of Him as a father.

One of the reasons He may have chosen to refer to the First Person of the Trinity as Father was to make clear to us fathers that He was to be our role model in carrying out our duties of fatherhood.

To be sure, mothers will benefit by following the example of God the Father as well. But somehow Our Lord must have felt that we “macho” fathers would be more likely to follow the example of God the Father than God the Mother.

It would be worthwhile for all fathers to consider their relationship with God and reflect on God's traits as a father – and how they can practice these traits in their own families. Here are just five of them.

Providence

God looks over us always and provides for all our needs. He does this effortlessly, because He is omniscient.

Fathers are also called to be providential. We look after our families and provide for them. However, we must make an effort to provide the care our families need. They not only need food, shelter, clothing and education; they need spiritual and emotional nurturing as well.

In order to provide for all the needs of the members of our families, we must be fully engaged in their lives. We must be “tuned in.” This usually requires that we be involved in their lives, spend time with them and pay attention to them a sufficient number of hours per day.

Workaholics, beware! If we don't return from work at a reasonable hour most of the time, we are putting our families at risk, and we are abdicating our responsibilities as father.

One more bit of advice for fathers who want to be tuned in to the emotional needs of their kids – listen to your wives! They will pick up on things about which you would not have a clue.

Authority

God the Father is the ultimate authority. He created the world and holds it in existence by the power of His will. He can do all things. His word is law.

Fathers, in collaboration with their wives, have authority in their families. This authority must be wielded wisely.

The home is not a democracy. It is more like a benevolent dictatorship. But our rule must be steeped in service. We don't bark out commands to be obeyed without question. We lead our families through service and love.

And lead we must, because if we do not lead our families, someone else will. Those who are ready and willing to lead your children include their peers and the media.

Parents must be proactive, set rules, demand respect and obedience and lavish their children with love and affection. As the father of eight children between the ages of 15 and 27, I can tell you they will thank you later for loving them in this way.

Patience

People who hear that I have eight kids immediately assume that I have the patience of Job. Well, I don't. Growing in patience has been a lifelong struggle for me. But I am improving. It helps me to consider God's incredible patience with me.

Let's face it: We all blow it time and time again. Thank goodness Our Lord knew this and gave us the Sacrament of Penance. How many times do we come back to the confessional with the same sins? We resolve to be better, and then we commit the same sin again. But God is always ready to forgive us and offer us advice and consolation.

We fathers need to remember how we repeatedly disobey our Father in heaven. If nothing else, it should give us some perspective when we are tempted to lose our patience with our children.

Teacher

God the Father is a teacher. He gave us the Ten Commandments and the Church to teach us and guide us in matters of faith and morals.

Fathers have a crucial role in teaching their children and forming them in the faith. Our teaching is carried out first and foremost through example.

Our children must see us struggling to live our faith and values. They need to see that we are willing to pay a price for something we believe in. If they don't see this, it won't have any value to them.

Fathers should also be actively involved in providing religious formation to their children. We can't just leave it to the Catholic school or parish. We can talk to them about God and our faith and give them extra doctrinal formation during the summer months. They may complain some, but it's worth it.

Unconditional love

God loves us despite everything we've done to alienate ourselves from him. The Scriptures are filled with evidence of God's unconditional love for us. Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son makes it clear that there is no sin too grave for our Father to forgive. Indeed, He is waiting for each of us to approach Him with a repentant heart.

We fathers must play the role of the father in the parable – just as we played and continue to play the role of the prodigal son. The process of growing up is a difficult one for our children. At times, they will disappoint us. In fact, there may be times when they are not particularly

lovable. These are the times we must love them all the more.

A father's examination of conscience

- > Do I continue to court my wife each day, realizing the best gift I can give to my children is a happy marriage?
- > Do I try to get home from work in time for dinner with the family?
- > Is it clear to my kids that my faith is the most important thing in my life?
- > Do my kids know I love them unconditionally?
- > When is the last time I spent one-on-one time with each of my children?
- > Do I make sure my children dress modestly and teach them why it's important?
- > Do we have a television policy in our home that ensures only good and wholesome programming is aired in my home and only for a limited period of time? Do I personally observe the family television policy?
- > Do I encourage and plan family outings?
- > Do I teach my children the spirit of poverty by not acquiring needless "toys"?
- > Do I see myself as the servant of my family?

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We should ask Our Lord for the grace to love our children unconditionally. Indeed, conditional love is no love at all. What better assurance can we have that we truly love than if our love is accompanied by the Cross?

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