

God's Word for Dads

Five Scripture passages that every father should commit to heart – and why

By Stephen Gabriel

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her (Eph 5:25).

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Christ was, and continues to be, the greatest “lover” of all time. And He taught us that true love is expressed through sacrifice, through a giving of self. This is the kind of love that St. Paul is calling us husbands to give to our wives. He is asking us to be the kind of husbands who give more than receive.

That means smiling when we're tired. It means helping out with the kids when we'd rather be reading the newspaper. It means struggling day in and day out to be more patient.

We do not abdicate our role as head of the household when we serve the others. When we serve our family, we are merely following in the footsteps of Jesus. He is our Lord and Master, yet His role was to serve – and He continues to do so.

When we find ourselves grouching about having so little time for ourselves, for being asked to do so much, let's try to remind ourselves that that's the way it's supposed to be. God gave us our families to serve. We are being asked to give everything for our families. Indeed, we are being called to be modern heroes in our families and in our society. If we are faithful, our heroism will be our ticket to heaven.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? (Mt 6:25-26).

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As fathers, we do a lot of worrying. We worry about our children. We worry about money. We worry about our careers. Whenever I would start fretting about these or other concerns, my wife would remind me about this passage from Scripture, and I would feel better.

God knows we have these burdens, and we will fare so much better if we turn them over to Him. Of course, we must do everything humanly possible to resolve our problems. But, in the final analysis, He wants us to rely more on Him. He wants us to see past the strictly human dimensions of our lives and look for the supernatural. We were made for heaven! We are wayfarers in this world. This life of ours is, just as St. Teresa of Avila put it, “a bad night in a bad inn.”

However, for many of us, we need only consider how good we have it compared to other poor souls who are so much worse off than we. And in any event, we can be certain that God treats us no worse than He treated His own beloved Son. Remember that every cross that comes our way is a sure sign of God's paternal love.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

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Few fathers begin their venture of fatherhood with adequate training for the job. We rely on "common sense," and most of us probably do what our parents did when we were kids.

That's a good start. But it's not nearly enough for most of us dads, who must not only deal with the antics of our kids, but also struggle to overcome our own defects and shortcomings, many of which come to the surface during the process of raising our kids. We need to examine our own behavior from time to time and make adjustments when we find it wanting.

While we may not knowingly provoke our children to anger, it probably happens more than we think because we fail to put ourselves in their place during a discussion or argument. We can maintain a proper father-child relationship with our kids if we show them the respect and consideration they expect and deserve.

This is especially important in our relationship with our teenagers. We should normally have good reasons for denying the request of our teenager to go to a particular place or engage in some activity. Rather than falling back on our instincts to be authoritarian, let's try to explain our reasoning with our kids. They still may not agree, but, if we try to communicate to them with clarity and affection, they may be able to accept our decision, rather than storm off in a huff.

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him takes care to chastise him (Prv 13:24).

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Discipline can be the greatest act of love we bestow on our children. I'll not enter the debate here on the issue of spanking children. But I will say that, as fathers, we have a serious obligation to teach our children the virtues – and this frequently means disciplining our kids, in an appropriate way, when their behavior does not meet our standards.

It is often much easier to give in to a child who seeks instant gratification. He wants the toy, now! She wants to get her drivers' license on her 16th birthday. Yet, you may know these would not be best for your children. When their response to their disappointment is inappropriate, how should we react? This is a time to train them.

Unfortunately, we fathers like instant gratification, too. We may teach a lesson today, but the lesson may not be learned for many years. It's a cumulative process. However, if we hang in there and do the dirty work now, our kids will reap the reward as they mature into good Catholic adults.

What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him (1Cor 2:9).

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We fathers are in the trenches much of the time. Let's face it: Life is a struggle. In fact, if it isn't, we're probably doing something wrong.

In the midst of our efforts to raise our families, to make a living, to live our faith in the middle of the world, it is good to consider where we are going.

St. Paul reminds us that our reward is wonderful beyond our wildest dreams. God just asks us to love Him – to keep His commandments.

Is it worth it? You tell me. Twenty years, 50 years, 90 years of struggle versus an eternity of mind-boggling happiness?

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