

Father's Day "Meditation"

Rob Eppes 6/17/18

I appreciate the opportunity to be involved in the creation of today's celebration of Fathers. Over our lives we discover that our Dads, or those of us who are Dads can be Fun, Silly, Embarrassing and Goofy.

I know I can be. Having a kid allows me to be. And that's one of the blessings of being a father.

Today, as I look back I think Dads are amazing.

My Dad could shift gears on our Volkswagen while holding a beer in one hand and prying open pistachio nuts in the other. That's just one memory I have of my Dad.

Another memory...My Dad had a heartwarming and sophisticated repertoire of road trip and campfire songs. "Green Green Grass of Home," "100 bottles of beer on the wall". And one song that he and my elder siblings sang so fast I and I was just so young that I could never figure out the order of the words. It was very frustrating and exasperating. It was our family's version of "There's a hole in the bottom of the Sea," (which sounded like a lot of gobbledeegook to me).

But, I could always be relied upon to mumble my way through the verse and belt out the refrain. As I sometimes do now with hymns in church.

The most meaningful memory I have of my Dad is when we met just before the first Christmas after my eldest brother's death to lay a wreath on his grave. In this moment, having lost the ability to make amends with one son after a lifetime of acrimony and distrust, the grace of God came between me and my father. That day my Dad said to me, "My wish for you is whatever you wish for yourself."

In this sentiment he was saying so much. He was saying "I'm sorry." He was saying, "I love you." He was ALSO saying, "This is all I can do for you."

And that was enough. That was all his little boy – who in that moment was 27 years old – needed from his Father to get him through the rest of his life.

Moving away from my personal story for a moment...

As I was preparing for today I did some googling and found something I want to share.

I am not the kind of Dad who regularly uses sports analogies, but I am going to continue from here by highlighting an organization that positions NFL players and coaches as role models for fathers in their fan base. These players go on speaking engagements to uplift and encourage fathers to take proactive roles in their children's lives. The organization is called ALL PRO DAD.

What I am going to share now I took right off their website...

“Passion, Discipline, Work ethic, Commitment, Loyalty

All of these characteristics are vital to play and coach professional football. The All Pro Dad spokesmen exemplify these virtues not only on the field, but even more importantly in their roles as fathers. These men realize the true victory in life is not on a scoreboard, but is measured by the love and honor of their children.

The website goes on to offer these 10 Things Scripture Says about Being a Father

1. Don't provoke your children

The alternative, the scripture suggests, is to raise them to be young people of faith.

2. Be your child's "First Teacher"

It's our responsibility to "train up a child in the way he/she should go." Not the school, not the government, but us.

3. Dads need to exemplify a good life

Scripture teaches that who we are and how we live is like a "letter from God." Our kids read that letter, every day.

4. Provide for your family

This idea covers more than rent and food, but making sure our family's needs are addressed across the board.

5. Good dads discipline their children

The one who loves their children, scripture says, "is careful to discipline them."

6. Dads spend time with their children, and it's not empty time The scriptures are clear that dads must engage their children in the kind of deep, heart-to-heart conversations that impart more than facts, but teach wisdom.

7. Compassion is a "dad" characteristic

Psalm 103:13 points out, As a father has compassion on his children," "so the LORD has compassion."

8. "Put your money where your mouth is"

Well, not in those exact words. But the Book of James instructs us to not only be "hearers" of God's word, but "doers" also.

9. Dads never give up on their kids

As in the story of "The Prodigal Son" a father never gives up hope and is ready to receive his child back with open arms. And, finally,

10. Dads pray for their children

King David prayed for his son, Solomon. Children who know without any doubt that their dads pray for them every day own a deep sense of love and security." Aubrey, I pray for you every day.

That's all good advice from the ALL PRO DAD organization.

These are all ideals to which fathers like me will always aspire. But, being mere mortals, we often fall short.

All of the fathers in the room today know of times when they have fallen short of these ideals.

And while some of us may have been fortunate to have an almost perfect father, most of us who HAVE or who HAD fathers know of times when their fathers fell short of these ideals or of your expectations of them.

Some of our fathers may have fallen short on providing basic needs. Some may have been cruel or abusive. Or were simply not there at all.

No matter the circumstances or how long a time we have with them, we hold our fathers in our hearts and minds. Some of us are holding hurt. Some of us are holding joy. Others have a mix of both. And at the heart of all of our memories, be they painful or joyful, is love. Love expressed, love unspoken, love denied, love unrequited, love personified.

I remember a story told by my Mother who was one of 12 Depression-era siblings growing up on Bethel Street in Baltimore. They had so little...so little money, so little food, so little room in their little row house that my Mother and her older sister actually lived in the house next door to her family with a kind, childless couple. A man and woman who discovered you do not have to be blessed with children of your own to be a Mother or Father.

One day when my Mom was 7 years old, her real Father, who lived next door, was cutting down a tree for firewood. He was literally out on a limb and just as his brother yelled up to warn him, he touched a live wire and was electrocuted.

At the age of 7, my Mother lost her Dad.

Before her death, my Mother shared the only two memories she had of her father. She recalled a time when she fell and cut her chin and he took her to the store and bought her NECCO Wafers.

And, as my Mother always knew when to throw in some levity, her second memory was of her father saying to her mother, "Elsie, if you just wouldn't nag me so much"

Some of us have no memories of our Fathers at all, so my Mom always felt blessed to recall that moment of love and compassion she had with her father when she cut her chin.

Others of us have veritable lifetimes of memories. And Dad's being the imperfect humans that we are, some of our children look upon those memories fondly while others would rather forget their father's altogether.

No matter the circumstance of your situation with your father, you have a relationship with him. Regardless of what kinds of memories are conjured up when you think of your father...good, bad or indifferent...regardless of whether he is living or deceased, you have a relationship with your father deep in your heart and soul.

No matter where your father scores on that All PRO DAD scale of **Passion, Discipline, Work ethic, Commitment, Loyalty.**

I invite you today to consider your Dad, to contemplate your Dad and his role in your life with

JOY, COMPASSION, LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

Because no matter how well your Dad played his Father role for you and your family, chances are he was doing the best he could.

Chances are there isn't anything your Dad wouldn't do for you if he could.

And chances are there isn't anything you wouldn't do for you Dad.

I will close by finishing my personal story of my father.

I am the youngest of 6 children. My Father and Mother divorced when I was 7 years old.

My relationship with my Dad was always strained. Many Dads of his generation and before were not equipped to convey their emotions in a productive way.

Strong social mores prescribing a Father's role in the family, at work, and in society governed many of our Fathers and Grandfathers.

Economic and other hardships molded boys and young men into Fathers that may have not been capable of being there for us in all the ways we may have needed them.

And Wartime did not help. War either took our fathers away from us forever; turned the tables by making the children the caregivers of physical wounds; or made our Fathers unavailable to us through emotional wounds.

I think a mix of some of these made my Father the man he was. Recent events in Korea reconnected me to my father who was a physician in a MASH unit during the Korean War.

I have his army jacket. I was going to wear it today, but it's too small. I am not sure how I ended up with it. But beside my DNA that flows in my blood, and this small statue of an indigenous Medicine Man, his army jacket is my sole inheritance. These were all things left behind by him in 1972 when he walked out of our house. Nothing came to me after his death.

Well, almost nothing.

You recall I began by expressing my exasperation at never really knowing the words to our family's version of "There's a Hole in the Bottom of the Sea." I understand now that what I was missing wasn't just the words to the song, it was the connection that my elder siblings had with my Dad when he was Fun, Silly, Embarrassing, and Goofy. Because the only time he was Fun, Silly, Embarrassing and Goofy was when he sang those songs.

Shortly after my Dad's death I was driving down I-95 with my daughter Aubrey in the car seat in the back. She was about 6 months old.

I'm driving along and out of nowhere I started to sing the song that for decades the words had eluded me. It was as if my Dad wanted me to teach the song to my daughter.

And it goes like this... (you may know a different version, ours is)

There's a hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a hole, there's a hole, there's a hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a hole, there's a hole, there's a hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a hole, there's a hole, there's a hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a frog on the bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a frog on the bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a hole, there's a hole, there's a hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a wort on the frog on the bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a wort on the frog on the bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a hole, there's a hole, there's a hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a fly on the wort on the frog on the bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a fly on the wort on the frog on the bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a hole, there's a hole, there's a hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a flea on the fly on the wort on the frog on the bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a flea on the fly on the wort on the frog on the bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a hole, there's a hole, there's a hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a speck on the flea on the fly on the wort on the frog on the bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

There's a speck on the flea on the fly on the wort on the frog on the bump on the log in the hole in the bottom of the sea

(big crescendo)

There's a hole, there's a hole, there's a hole in the bottom of the sea!

Amen.