

Community Church of Issaquah
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Why God So Loved the World
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Father's Day has always been an interesting holiday for me, even from the days of my childhood. I recall going to the park to engage in what was called "arts and crafts" to make a child's version of all sorts of items. My own father held onto an ashtray I made him out of popsicle sticks. It never dawned on me that it was encouraging him to continue smoking – a bad habit he began when he was 11 and continued until his death from lung cancer at age 75. Were there other creative crafts? Oh yes, like a shoeshine kit made from wooden pieces given to us from the craft master. This was long before the days when I began my addiction to greeting cards.

There just seems to have been an entirely different observance of this holiday back in the day than today. Fathers were revered and given the role of boss to kids and sometimes to mothers. Do you recall a television series starring a man named Robert Young called "Father Knows Best"? The whole world seemed to pause once a week just to watch that amazing family. I recall once when my family were all gathered around the old black and white television to watch the latest episode. One of my sisters called out to our mom who was cleaning the kitchen and said, "Mama, hurry. Father Knows Best." My mother muttered thinking no one would hear her but we all did when she said, "Yes, but Mother knows better."

Fathers have a significant place in each of our lives if we were honest. It is true, not every father was or is perfect, but each was or is unique. Growing into adulthood I would often say to myself, "I'm going to be the very opposite of my father." Surprisingly, I think I had copied some of his traits. My father, Frank, had a difficult life growing up in a home with his Italian Immigrant, Mafia member father and a mother who didn't understand the word fidelity. Finishing the 8th grade, he left school to work for his father in the family produce company. His struggles led to addictions to tobacco and alcohol at a very early age. But he was a hard worker all his life. I'd like to think I learned that trait from him.

Fatherhood. It's a deep subject to reflect on not just today on Father's Day, but often in life. As a father myself, I always pause on this special day to reflect on my own role as father and grandfather. I ask myself, "Have I done an acceptable job?" My son, Josh, loves to tell a story on every Father's Day about an episode he and I had. As a 6-year-old, he was a devoted fan of Star Wars. One day I needed to go to the mall to purchase a birthday gift for a friend. Not being very creative, I chose the music store to buy a cassette tape for him. As we pulled into the parking lot, I stopped the car to give him instructions about how he needed to behave. "We're going to the record store, no place else, and we aren't shopping for you today. OK?" He shrugged and said, "I guess."

Entering the record store, I was in a panic to see the huge Star Wars display at the entrance, and of course, Josh, froze and began to grab items with both hands. I kept

walking. pretending I didn't see anything and went over to one of the aisles looking for something I thought my friend might like. Then Josh appeared with his hands full of items. This was the conversation:

Me: Josh, go put those back. I told you we are only here to buy one birthday cassette.

Josh: But I need these.

Me: Put them back, please.

Josh: But Mom wants you to buy them for me.

Me: She didn't tell me that, so you have to get her to buy them. Go put them back, please.

He stalked off heading back to the display when he saw a woman a bit down the aisle shopping. Walking up to her, he grabbed her arms and said in a very loud voice, "That's the meanest daddy in the whole world, that one right there," (pointing to me). Needless to say, the whole store was entertained and laughed. Josh loves to tell that story as often as he can, and laughingly saying I am the meanest daddy in the whole world.

Like me, you have your own memories of your father, grandfather, son, grandson or any other man who filled the role of father. Each year when I visit this holiday, I turn my attention to the passage from Luke chapter 11. It begins with what we know to be the Lord's Prayer. This was not only Jesus's instruction to the followers about how to pray and what to pray for, but what his Father was like and how much he loved him.

Jesus begins this conversation with his disciples and followers with words any father – or any parent – would love to hear. "Our Father who is in Heaven, Holy is your

name.” What does that mean? It was clearly Jesus’s way to honor his Heavenly Father and to share Him with the world. He never said, “My Father who is in Heaven.” He wanted everyone to experience the relationship with God, His Father, that he had. One overwhelmed with love. And then he said something quite interesting, “Your kingdom will come, and your will be done.” Perhaps we can translate that to something like, “It’s what you want, Father, not what I want. I’ll do what you ask. I’ll teach others to do your will, too.”

Then like every child, Jesus asked His Father for the things he needed to make his life full – his daily breads lest he go hungry, his need to forgive others who would sin against him and keep him from things that would tempt him. Is that what children do with their parent – mother or father? Do we ask for the same grace and help that Jesus told us to do, the same that he did with his Heavenly Father? As a son, I often asked my own father to take care of me. As a father, I wanted my own son to come to me when he was in need. That is part of the role of father that Jesus so clearly addressed for his followers.

Did it end there? No. He followed this prayer with an example of the kind of Father God is for all of us. Let me repeat some of the verses you heard earlier.

“So, I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an

egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Fatherhood can at times be difficult. You want to believe that your children are pretty perfect, but from time to time you will have to deal with issues that challenge you to the limit. But in the end, you come away understanding that neither your children nor you are perfect. Yes, there might be days when your 6-year-old calls you the meanest daddy in the whole world, but there are more days when your child tells you they love you and thank you for things you gladly gave.

I want to pause here and give you a chance to share a memory you might have about your father, grandfather, son, brother, uncle – whoever was a father figure in your life. Those memories are what we always carry with us in our hearts. In just a minute, I will pass a bowl with some small cards that are here for you. The cards say, “My memory and My Thanks.” When you take one, or more, it will be to a way for you to recall some memory that comes to your heart. After some of you share a memory, I will pass around a Memory Box for you to place that memory card in. Then we will have a prayer of thanks for those precious memories and those precious fathers.