



“Our Father, By Whose Name All Fatherhood is Known”

Fathers Reflecting Our Father in Heaven

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It was February 20, 2018 and I was in my classroom. My class had just gone out for a break when my phone rang. It was my sister, and when I answered it was immediately apparent there was something wrong. Eventually she got out the words "Dad is dead. He was in an accident. He was driving and something happened. They tried to revive him, but he's dead." She then told me how not a quarter mile from his house his car slowly drove off the road into a neighbor's yard two doors down from my parent's house and stopped. The neighbor went and alerted my mother, who happened to be visiting with a niece who was training to be a nurse. They both ran over and found him slumped over the wheel. They got him out of the car and called 911. My niece tried to revive him but to no avail. Paramedics rushed him to the hospital where they put him on a ventilator. When all my siblings were at the hospital my mother told them to take him off the ventilator and he was declared dead. There was a pause after hearing the news and I asked about my mother, I asked my sister how she was, and about my brothers. We talked for a bit and my sister said she'd be in touch with me tomorrow.

And me, it was a shock but at that moment I took the news in stride. As a Lutheran pastor I had received my share of phone calls informing me that a member's father or mother or grandparent had died, and then gone to comfort the family and handled it calmly and professionally. So why should this be any different? This is the way of all flesh, right? Dust you are, and to dust you shall return.

After I hung up I thought to myself “I should go tell my wife,” so I walked
25 over to her classroom to share the news with her. She suggested I might want to
go home and I told her I’d think about it. I then happened to see our principal in
the hallway and let him know. He too suggested I might want to go home. I told
him I didn’t think so, but as we talked I could slowly feel this weight descending
on me and I told him that yeah, maybe I would go home. When I got home I called
30 my daughter who was a student at Bethany at the time but my call went to her
voicemail. I told her to call me back when she got the message.

When she did, I found that I was not nearly as composed as I thought. The
grief had begun to take hold, and in telling my daughter about her grandfather’s
death my voice broke more than once. I did nothing for the rest of the day but lay
35 in bed and talk to my siblings. I traveled back to Dallas for the funeral and was
basically a zombie. I felt the weight of that grief for months afterward. Friends
called me and I couldn’t speak to them without crying. And all through that time I
remember being confounded at just how deeply I felt this grief. My father was – is
– a Christian. I am a Lutheran pastor with no doubts about the resurrection of the
40 dead. And I was close to my father, but I never thought of our relationship as
particularly affectionate. So why was I feeling such deep grief?

Apparently it had taken the death of my father to impress upon me just
how significant fathers are.

God as Father

I of course had known this truth intellectually. Ever since I had learned the Lord's Prayer I'd known that "Father" is one of the pictures God likes to use when describing His relationship to us, although this metaphor has a slow start. The first
 50 time we read this in Scripture is in Exodus 4:22 when Moses is instructed by God to say to Pharaoh, "*Thus says the LORD: 'Israel is My son, My firstborn.'*"¹ This metaphor won't be used again until Deuteronomy 32:6 where Moses, shortly before his death, speaks to the children of Israel reminding them of who God is, saying "*Is not He your father, who created you, who made you and established you?*"²
 55 And then it will be used only six more times over the next 800 or so years of literature: God will tell David to not build the Temple but to leave that to Solomon, of whom God says "*I will be his Father, and he shall be My son*" (2 Sam 7:14). David will use the metaphor in Psalm 68³, Psalm 103⁴, and in his song celebrating the gathering of the materials for the building of the Temple.⁵ Ethan
 60 will use it in Psalm 89⁶, and finally Solomon in Proverbs 3:12.⁷

The majority of the times when the picture is used come from Isaiah and Jeremiah. I find this interesting since these are prophets speaking to a people struggling with oppression and exile, and with the troubling thought that they

¹ Quotations from Scripture will use the New King James unless otherwise noted.

² And right away I note one. Here I am quoting from the English Standard Version because it does a better job translating the verse.

³ "A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows is God in his holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families...."

⁴ "As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him."

⁵ "Blessed are You, LORD God of Israel, our Father forever and ever" (1 Chron. 29:10).

⁶ "He shall cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation'" (Ps 89:26).

⁷ "For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights."

had lost the love of God. It is Isaiah who tells God's people that the Messiah will
 65 be an "Everlasting Father" to them, and who gives them the prayer, "*Doubtless
 You are our Father. Though Abraham was ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge
 us. You, O LORD, are our Father; our Redeemer from Everlasting is Your name*" (Is
 63:16). Jeremiah declares "*They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will
 lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they
 70 shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel*" (Jer. 31:9).

Overall, God is referred to as "father" in the Old Testament maybe 15
 times, which makes it a somewhat rare occurrence.⁸ But this image will explode in
 the New Testament, especially in the Gospels. Jesus will call God "Father" around
 165 times, something especially seen in Matthew and John. In fact, He does so in
 75 His very first recorded words: "*Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must
 be about My Father's business?*" (St. Luke 2:49). The most notable occurrence is, of
 course, in the Lord's Prayer. There is a logic to this. If Jesus is emphasizing His
 role as Messiah and the Son of God, it makes sense that He would focus on this
 picture. Calling God "Father" helps to teach the Holy Trinity. Calling God "Our
 80 Father" also emphasizes an important aspect of His work as Messiah: repairing
 the divide between God and humanity. After His resurrection Jesus very
 pointedly says to Mary Magdelene. "*Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to
 My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and*

⁸ This is especially evident when you realize the word אב is the 38th most frequently used word in the Hebrew Old Testament, used 1210 times (Parry, 2021). If it refers to God 15 of those times, barely 1% of its usage.

your Father, and to My God and your God' " (St. John 20:17). Mary was happy to see

85 Jesus alive. Jesus directs her to the greater joy: that we may now, "with all
boldness and confidence," approach God as our Father.

Not surprisingly, St. Paul will make frequent use of this picture as well
because it accentuated an important part of his work. He is especially an apostle to
the Gentiles, a group of people considered outside the family of God. St. Paul will
90 make it clear this is no longer the case. The Fatherhood of God is a theme of one of
St. Paul's most well-known sermons, his address on the Areopagus.

Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very
religious; for as I was passing through and considering the
objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this
95 inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I
proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in
it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in
100 temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's
hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life,
breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every
nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has
determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of
105 their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope
that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not
far from each one of us; for "*in Him we live and move and have our
being*", as also some of your own poets have said, "*For we are
also His offspring.*"

110 Therefore, **since we are the offspring of God**, we ought not to
think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone,
something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times
of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men
everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on
115 which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man
whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by
raising Him from the dead.

Acts 17:22-31

Notice how the fatherhood of God is the thread of this sermon. Who is
 120 God? He is the One who made everything, who gives life, who “made from one
 blood every nation of men,” who seeks a relationship with His people. And why?
 Because, “as some of your own poets have said, We are His offspring”⁹. St. Paul
 portrays the True God as a god much different from the divinities known to the
 Athenians. The True God, says Paul, wants nothing from you. He desires to *give* to
 125 you. He is like a father. No, more than that, He *is* your Father, and therefore loves
 you like a father.

This will also form one of his themes in Ephesians:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who
 130 are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision
 made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without
 Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and
 strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and
 without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once
 were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

135 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has
 broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in
 His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained
 in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the
 two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both
 140 to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death
 the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were
 afar off and to those who were near. **For through Him we both
 have access by one Spirit to the Father.**

145 Now, therefore, **you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but
 fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of
 God.**

Ephesians 2:11-19

⁹ Appendix A has a brief discussion of St. Paul’s use of ancient authors in Acts 17.

150 *“You who once were far off have been brought near”*, writes St. Paul, twice. And then finishes the thought by telling them just how near: *“You...are members of the household of God.”* To be a member of the household was to recognize the head of the household as your father. And while one could be a slave and considered part of the household, St. Paul will continue to build on the theme of Unity with God until finally at the beginning of chapter 5 he tells them they are God’s children.

155 Or, sometimes St. Paul would just cut to the chase: *“You did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’ ”* (Rom. 8:15).

The depiction of God as Father is significant because when God institutes something He often intends it to be a reflection of Himself. God institutes marriage in the garden, and later we are told this is to be a reflection of the relationship between Christ and His Church. God institutes government after the flood, and we later read those in power are to reflect God’s care and protection. It is God who institutes Fatherhood, and from the passages which talk about this we can see what He would like reflected: His protection, His kindness, and most of all His love and mercy.

The Reflection Tarnished

170 After Creation, every story in Genesis is a story about family. And notably, all the fathers we meet are flawed. The Old Testament is not scripted like a 1950’s sitcom where every episode the wife or one of the kids gets into some sort of

trouble and it takes the wise father to set everything straight. Rather, the fathers we meet in the Old Testament are usually deeply flawed, and often the ones causing the trouble.

175 On the one hand this should not surprise us because this is the nature of good literature. One criticism often leveled at Christians is that we are always trying to censor literature and libraries and yet we encourage the reading of the Bible, which is full of violence and hypocritical behavior.¹⁰ First, this is the literary equivalent of saying “You claim to be against racism, and yet you encourage
180 students to read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a book full of racism!” More importantly, it shows the Holy Spirit understands how to write a story. Flawed characters are essential to good literature, because in order for stories to engage us we need to see ourselves somewhere in the characters. A character who is not flawed cannot grow, and a character that cannot grow has nothing to teach me.

185 Well, that isn’t quite true. A character who is perfect may have plenty to teach me, but more than likely I will be unwilling to learn from him because I will not be able to relate to him. The best characters show me some reflection of myself, and who thus teach me to face my own character flaws.

 And I think men especially need this. Men, especially good men, tend
190 toward perfectionism. We are competitive. When we are engaged in something we care about – like our families – we want to do it well. It is a blessed relief to open up Holy Scripture and see these flawed husbands and fathers. Because we

¹⁰ There are any number of examples of this, but (Pendharkar, 2022) collects a number.

understand the point of the story. It isn't to grant us an excuse to act sinfully. It is to see their flawed behavior for the sin that it is, recognize our own flawed and
 195 sinful behavior, be warned against it, and find the ultimate solution to it in Christ.

We are Tempted to Follow, But God Expects Fathers to Lead

200 *To Adam [God] said, 'Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat of it": Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; For dust you are, and to*
 205 *dust you shall return (Genesis 3:17-19).*

After God creates Adam He follows up His gift of life with another gift, one that is especially important for men: He gives Adam purpose. God takes Adam and places him in Eden. He gives Adam dominion over the Earth, tells Adam to tend and keep the garden, and then gives the command "*Of every tree of the garden*
 210 *you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"* (Gen. 2:16-17). This last command is a gift as well. We tend to hear it as restrictive as if Adam is being denied something, but Adam would have heard it differently. He would have looked at the gifts of God surrounding him and wondered how to thank God for His kindness. In
 215 giving the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and with it this command, Adam had his answer. How would he thank God? By obedience to God's

command. By eating of all the other trees but not this one, he would show God his love and thankfulness.¹¹

Sadly, Adam failed in this act of worship. Because God had placed such
 220 importance on not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it is
 almost certain Adam would have recognized its fruit and known what Eve was
 offering to him and what he was eating. Yet in eating he showed he had chosen to
 place more importance on the desires of his wife than the command of God. We
 know God saw this as a particular failure on Adam's part because when He later
 225 confronts Adam and Eve, He deals with Eve first, then Adam, and makes it clear
 that He holds Adam responsible for the events in the Garden, pointing out his
 failure had disastrous consequences not only for Adam and Eve, but all of
 humanity. It brought death. St. Paul later reinforces this in Romans 5. He calls it
Adam's sin, and continues with "*through one **man** sin entered the world... by the one*
 230 *man's offense many died... by one **man's** disobedience many were made sinners*".¹² One
 could argue Abraham made this same mistake of passivity with Sarah and Hagar,

¹¹ In his lectures on Genesis Luther makes the point that with the tree and the command God is establishing the Church: "In this passage the church is established, before there was home or government.... If they had not fallen into sin, Adam would have transmitted this single command later on to all his descendants.... So, then, this tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or the place where trees of this kind were planted in large number, would have been the church at which Adam, together with his descendants, would have gathered on the Sabbath day" (*Luther's Works* Vol. 1, p. 105).

¹² It is interesting to note this section in Romans is mostly unaffected by the trend of using inclusive language in translation. The Greek says that sin entered the world δι' ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου. These days most translations will make a point of translating ἀνθρώπος as "human being" or "person". Except here, this one time. The word occurs twice in Romans 5:12, and most do what the EHV did: translate it the first time as "man" and the second time as "people", e.g. "So then, just as sin entered the world through one **man** and death through sin, so also death spread to all **people** because all sinned". The only exception I've found to this is the Common English Bible, which is consistent in their translation philosophy of using inclusive language: "So in the same way that sin entered the world through one **person**, and death came through sin, so death spread to all **human beings** with the result that all sinned."

Jacob with his family, and if you want a real negative example, Herod Antipas with Herodias.

But God would have husbands and fathers be leaders in their home. In
 235 Ephesians 5 St. Paul writes that “*the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church*”. These words are written to wives but are to be heard by husbands and fathers as well. To wives they are to be a reminder that they are to submit themselves to the authority of their imperfect, sinful husbands. Not because they are beneath their husbands, but because this is how they fulfill their vocation; it is
 240 how they serve them. It also means that every time a wife thinks of reasons why she doesn’t need to submit herself to her husband, she is really rationalizing why she shouldn’t submit to Christ. Every time she recognizes her husband as her head and submits herself to him, she is reflecting her Savior to her husband, and her dignity and worth are found in this service. To husbands and fathers those words
 245 are a reminder that they are to be leaders in their homes, but their leadership is to reflect Christ. The Holy Spirit is careful in the words He chooses, and it is interesting that in this passage He uses the word “head”.¹³ There are plenty of ways to say “boss” or “master” in Greek. Paul’s use here of the word “head” picks up on its use back in 4:15.¹⁴ It also indicates we are not speaking of a master/slave
 250 relationship but of something greater. The word means “head” like what is on your shoulders, but by extension “the source”, “the life” and “the thing that brings completion”. Each husband, each father is to understand he is the one who leads

¹³ κεφαλή, in case you were wondering what the Greek is.

¹⁴ “Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ.”

his family, but God has not given him his wife and children to serve him as if they were slaves. Rather God has set him in that family so that he may be the one who
255 *gives* to them. He is to guide and nurture his family, and be a source of what is good in his family. He is to embody *virtue*. If you've had any Latin you can see that the English "virtue" has the Latin word for "man" in it, *vir*, and there is a connection but it is a bit oblique. The English "virtue" actually comes from the Latin word *virtus* which is a hard word to translate into English. It literally means
260 "manliness", but more accurately it is the Roman ideal of brave, manly action. It is disciplined courage directed toward fulfilling one's responsibilities, especially toward the gods, your family, and the state. This is what God expects of men, especially of husbands. That they show their manliness by reflecting the qualities of *virtus*, along with the providence, love, and mercy of God the Father to their
265 families.

One of the primary jobs of a father's leading is in the raising of his children. It is from their father that children learn virtue, what it means to be a man. By his example a father is showing his children what it means to take responsibility for his family. He is showing both his sons and daughters what it means to be a good
270 husband, a good father, a good citizen, a good person.

God especially wants fathers to be leaders in their families when it comes to their spiritual life. The most important ways fathers do this is by attending church

with their families. There have been a number of studies on this, the included

275 graphic summarizes one of the more recent ones and emphasizes just how important a father's church attendance is. But the comfort is that this is also one of the easiest things you can do. Your simple attendance, 280 singing the hymns and participating in the liturgy sends a huge message to your

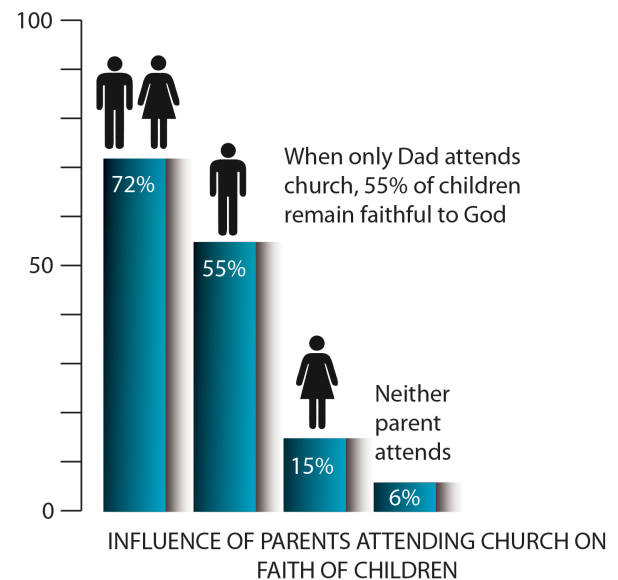
children that this is important, and is behavior they should model.

Some other easy ways to do this are:

You can pray for your family. A great time to do this is during "down"

285 times in the church service, such as right before the service starts, when the offering is being brought up or when the service is ending. You can pray for your family in the morning while shaving or brushing your teeth, or while driving to work. I'm sure your pastor would be happy to provide you with a nice written prayer, but a brief prayer during these times for God to bless your family and to 290 strengthen you as a husband and father is just as effective.

You can read Bible stories to your children. As a teacher I'll tell you that you should be reading to your children anyway, it is one of the most effective



Robert & Deborah Bruce, "Becoming Spiritual Soulmates With Your Child" 1996

things you can do to make them successful in school. Reading a Bible story to them is a great way to do this and have some devotional time with them. I cover
 295 more about this in the appendix¹⁵ but I always tell parents and teachers to not worry about teaching the theology of the story, just read it. This isn't because laity are inept, it has to do with age-appropriate learning. No one reads *Goodnight Moon* to a three year-old and then launches into a literary critical analysis. "Did you notice the themes of comfort and routine being emphasized by Margret Wise
 300 Brown? Where else have we seen these themes? What are some ways you can apply those to your life?" Read the story, discuss any questions that come up naturally, and call it good.

You can listen to memory work. If your children are in a Lutheran school they are being assigned Bible verses and hymn stanzas to memorize. They will
 305 certainly be getting memory work when they are in confirmation. Be the parent that listens to this to make sure it is learned. The easiest way to do this is to have the child say it to you once or twice every day.

In ancient times, men sat on one side of the church and women and children on the other.¹⁶ This practice continued through the Reformation and was
 310 even practiced by immigrants to the United States.

¹⁵ See Appendix B on Home Devotions

¹⁶"Let men be with men, and women with women. For now I need the example of Noah's ark: in which were Noah and his sons, and his wife and his sons' wives. For though the ark was one, and the door was shut, yet had things been suitably arranged. If the Church is shut, and you are all inside, yet let there be a separation, men with men, and women with women" (St Cyril, *Protocatechesis*, 14, NPNF, s. 2, v.7).

More interesting is *why* men and women were separated, and how they were separated. Men were seated on the pulpit side, and women on the other. It was a reminder that Adam had made the mistake of listening to his wife when he should have listened to God. By sitting before the pulpit, husbands and fathers
 315 were being reminded that part of being a good husband and father is to first listen to God.¹⁷

Today the practice has all but died out, but the reason it has died out is just as interesting, and just as salutary. Today, husbands and fathers are encouraged to sit with their families because we believe this is a better way to encourage and
 320 support them in their vocation.

We are tempted toward leniency, but God expects fathers to teach discipline.

*Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of
 325 his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice. Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." (1 Samuel 8:1-5).*
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Very often we think of fathers as the disciplinarian of the family. And yet among all the faults of fathers in the Bible the one that comes up most often is

¹⁷ Though the practice has all but died out, pay attention the next time you're in a cathedral or in an older Catholic church. You will notice there is a statue of St Joseph on the pulpit side, and St Mary on the other side. It was a visual reminder of where you should be sitting.

leniency. Abraham was unwilling to deal with Ishmael's mistreatment of Isaac.

335 Isaac seemed to overlook the misbehavior of Esau and Jacob. Jacob played favorites with Joseph and overlooked his arrogant behavior toward his brothers. Eli did not deal with the sin of his sons. David overlooked the sins of Absalom, which led to a rebellion. And you might have thought Samuel would have learned from the bad example of Eli, but he too was lenient with his sons. Then he made

340 them judges, something he probably wasn't supposed to do, which only allowed them to affect more people with their sinful behavior. We fault the people of Israel for asking Samuel to give them a king, but very likely their request was motivated in large part by the behavior of Samuel's sons. The people knew the sons were corrupt and wanted to put an end to the quasi-regime of Samuel's family; or

345 perhaps saw a king as someone who would actually deal with this problem.¹⁸

We hear a lot of warnings in the Bible about the sin of idolatry, and read a lot of examples. This abundance serves as a repeated warning of just how destructive this sin is. The same may be said for the abundance of examples of fathers who were too lenient with their children.

350 Also, like idolatry, the examples we see of fathers who were too lenient with their children are the end result of the sin. We don't see the many small steps that led to this result. It is unlikely that Samuel said to himself, "You know, Joel and Abijah have been such good kids; I should make them judges", and the next day the boys decided now would be a good time to start taking bribes. Very likely

¹⁸ After Saul is made king we don't hear any more about Samuel's sons, so it may be that Saul did deal with them.

355 there had been smaller bad behaviors before this that Samuel had failed to deal with, but as he failed to deal with these his sons behavior kept getting worse until Samuel couldn't deal with it.

And in one sense you understand Samuel's position. No parent likes to discipline their children. For one thing, as a parent you have that desire to see
360 your children happy, and you feel pain when they are sad or hurt. For another, you quickly discover it is one of those things that seems easy in theory but is always more complicated in practice. So you do it, but mostly because you have to. And because it is complicated, and hard it becomes easy to neglect this duty. Most fathers work all day, and when you come home you want a moment of
365 peace and then you want to enjoy your family. You don't want to come home and suddenly have to be the bad guy. Or it's dinner time, you told your son to not bring that toy to the table but there it is, and is it really worth the hassle and the tears when you take it from him, especially since right now he's being quiet? Or you hear your wife tell your daughter for the third time to get started on her
370 homework or to do this chore; and you just sat down. Do you really want to get up and deal with this?

As an experienced teacher, parent, and grandparent, I can tell you the definitive answer to those questions is Maybe. The thing about discipline is it is something you have to do, but it is impossible to give a formula or flow chart
375 because every family, every child, and every situation is unique. But I can give

some suggestions on how to discipline based on my own experiences as a parent and teacher:

Be consistent. After love, the thing most kids are looking for in their lives is Consistency. Few things give children more comfort than knowing what sort of behavior to expect from the adults in their life. This is the philosophy being
 380 espoused in Proverbs 13:24, *“Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him”*. The word translated “diligent” has the idea of an earnest seeking. It is the same word that is used in Psalm 63: *“O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and*
 385 *thirsty land where there is no water.”* In other words, it is something done out of desire and with a plan. So Strict Father or Laid Back Father almost doesn’t matter, as long as you are *consistent*, as long as your children have an idea of what to expect when they misbehave, that you are aware your children are going to sin and that you have a plan for dealing with this. This will help with....

As much as possible, discipline without emotion. As important as it is to know your children are sinners it is more important to know they are Christians, and like adult Christians, Romans 7:19 reflects their struggle as well: *“The good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.”* In other words, most of the time their sin is not a personal attack. It is them losing a battle with
 395 their sinful nature.¹⁹

¹⁹ I once read an article on classroom management which made a similar point but from a secular perspective. The author said that teachers need to learn to not take student misbehavior personally because it usually isn’t. It is lack of control. Therefore the focus of our discipline becomes teaching self-discipline rather than punishing the student because they are causing problems for me.

I know, this is hard. You love your children so much, and when they disobey you or take a tone with you or roll their eyes it does feel like a personal attack. But 99% of the time it isn't.²⁰ So go back and read what I said about Love and Consistency. I tell teachers "Warn once, then act". This helps them discipline
 400 with less emotion because it tends to keep the situation from getting emotional. The same is true with the children in your home. Warn once, then act. "I told you not to do X. You did X, so now Y happens."

The focus should be on discipline, not punishment. You are doing this because you love your children and want them to learn a lesson, in the very best
 405 sense of that phrase. You aren't doing it – or shouldn't be doing it – out of revenge because they are disturbing your peace or hurt your feelings. That's what St. Paul was warning against when he wrote "*Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*" (Eph. 6:4).

Corollary A to this is Always start small with disciplines. It is easy to
 410 increase, but when you decrease you can send the message you may not mean what you say.

Corollary B is The bigger the offense, the more likely it is that the giving of discipline should wait. Large offenses usually lead to big emotions, which makes

²⁰ Defiance is often an exception to this, but not always. The vast majority of defiant students I've dealt with have been students who were angry about something and their anger translated into a loss of self-control in speaking to me. Defiance should be dealt with differently, but we should still remember that their defiance was probably not part of some plan to win a power struggle, but evil they did not want to do, but kept on doing.

it easy to over-react. There is some wisdom in saying “I’d like to think about this
 415 before I figure out what your punishment will be.”

Remember to forgive. Most fathers are good about teaching their children to say “I’m sorry”. What we often forget is the proper response to “I’m sorry” is “I forgive you” and letting that be the last word. It is so easy to succumb to the temptation of a lecture, to make sure they realize the immensity of their sin and
 420 know just how bad their actions really were and what their punishment will now be to show how bad their actions were. But the correct response to an apology is “I forgive you.” Not, “I forgive you, but you better not do it again.” Or worse, “Well, let’s see how you do the rest of the day.” Or even worse, “Are you sure? Because from what I’ve seen....”

425 This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t give consequences. It doesn’t mean there won’t be times when you sit down with your child and spend some extra time developing a plan to do better, or that there won’t be times when you wonder if their apology was 100% sincere.²¹ But as you discipline you should bear in mind the words of the Small Catechism:

430

²¹ I’ve gotten more than a few consternated looks when I tell people not to worry too much about how sincere an apology sounds, whether the child is apologizing to you or to another child. But we should keep in mind that just like learning secular things, the early efforts of children learning spiritual things is going to be imperfect and we want to be careful in what we correct. The goal is to teach how Christians deal with sin. We don’t deal with it through revenge, or hiding it, or rationalizing it. We deal with it through confession and absolution, because that puts our sin with Jesus on the cross where sin is truly and forever dealt with. Then when you factor in the various personalities of children and developmental stages, determining sincerity becomes an impossible task. So take a note from pastoral theology courses: As a rule, treat every confession as genuine and let the Holy Spirit teach sincerity.

What is Confession?

435 Confession consists of two parts: One that we confess
our sins, the other that we receive absolution or
forgiveness from the pastor or confessor as from God
Himself, and in no way doubt but firmly believe that our
sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.

The section on Confession in the Small Catechism is one of the most
glorious jewels of Lutheranism. We don't want our actions to teach a third part,
440 that a person is not really forgiven until they have added their sincerity, or their
act of penance, or some other satisfaction to God. So work hard at making the
word of forgiveness your last word in a discipline situation. Clarify the sin, give
consequences and go over strategies to do better next time *first*, and then end with
an apology and forgiveness. Children spend so much time hearing about their
445 behavior and being told how to behave and how to do better. Consciously or
unconsciously they work to earn the attention and love of their parents and
teachers that it is very, very important they are hearing the message that they do
not need to earn the love of Jesus, that He loves them even in their imperfection,
even in their sin.²²

450

²² This is perhaps another reason to delay the giving of discipline, especially with larger offenses. By doing confession and absolution with the child first and then later talking about any consequences, you are separating the two activities. Not only temporally, but psychologically. It helps make it clear that forgiveness is found in the mercy of Jesus, not in the completion of their punishment.

We are tempted to selfishness, but God expects fathers to love.

455 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and
gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the
washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a
glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but
that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to
love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves
460 himself (Ephesians 5:25-28).*

We don't realize how revolutionary Ephesians 5 and 6 were for first century readers. On the one hand, what St. Paul does at the end of Ephesians was rather common: he was dictating to his readers what classicists call a Household Code, an outline of the responsibilities for everyone living under the authority of father
465 of the house. Many ancient authors did this, and aside from those in the Bible the most well-known of these comes from Aristotle.²³ All reflect the concept that the Romans would call *paterfamilias*, that a father was head of his household and held absolute authority over everyone in his home. More than tradition, this was a legal doctrine as well, which meant a father could legally end the marriages of his
470 children, decide to expose infants he did not want, sell his children into slavery, and administer punishments to members of his household, including death. In other words, he is the one who ultimately mattered in the home, and all in the home existed to serve him.

This is the environment in which St. Paul is writing. And how does he start
475 his household code? "*Wives...*" (Eph. 5:22). He addresses a group in the household

²³ See Appendix C for Aristotle's household code, found in his *Politics*. Aristotle is from the 4th century BC but his is a typical example of an household code from the Greco-Roman world, so Paul's readers would have been familiar with the concept if not the actual words.

that no one else had ever addressed, because in an ancient worldview they didn't really matter, so why would you address them? And what does he ask them to do? "...submit yourselves". He does not tell them to "obey". Rather, he addresses them as intelligent equals in the household who should recognize the authority
 480 that God has given to their husbands and willingly yield to it, just as they willingly yield to the authority of Christ. This is far different from Aristotle, who in his household codes talks about the relationship between a man and his slaves before talking about the relationship between a man and his wife, because the former is more important. And who, when he does finally get to talking about the
 485 relationship with his wife "as between the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject".²⁴

Husbands would have heard this beginning as well and been surprised. But then St. Paul goes on to say something more shocking: "*Husbands, love your wives*".²⁵ Again, it is hard to convey what a revolutionary idea this was for the
 490 ancient world. Ancient listeners and readers would have found the requirement to love your wife somewhat novel, even shocking, since Greek and Roman marriages were not about romance but procreation and allying families.²⁶ It was not

²⁴ Citation from Perseus. <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0086.tlg035.perseus-eng1:1.1254b>

²⁵ It is even more shocking when you read it in Greek. All the verbs in vv 22-24 – those written to wives – are nice polite verbs of exhortation. When St. Paul gets to v. 25 he uses the imperative: "Οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε τὰς γυναῖκας". When he gets to v. 28 ("So husbands ought to love their own wives...") he uses ὀφείλω, making it clear this is a moral obligation, a debt they owe to their wives. ("οὕτως ὀφείλουσιν [καὶ] οἱ ἄνδρες ἀγαπᾶν τὰς ἑαυτῶν γυναῖκας")

²⁶ It wasn't unusual for upper class Roman men to be married 5 or 6 times in their lifetime. As you needed to forge new alliances you would simply divorce your current wife so you could marry a new one. There were even cases where the new bride was pregnant with the child of the previous husband.

necessary that husband and wife love each other, just that they produce offspring. Indeed to love your wife was often seen as an effeminate weakness, since it
 495 prohibited you from thinking rationally.²⁷ So you could walk the streets of a Roman or Greek city and see graphic advertisements for prostitutes and it was expected that husbands would be visiting some of these prostitutes, but it was considered scandalous to publicly kiss your wife on the cheek. Thus Paul is very explicit in this section, almost as if to say, “Yes, you heard me correctly. *Love your*
 500 *wives.*”²⁸

This explicit instruction continues in chapter 6 when St. Paul addresses fathers with regard to their children: “*Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*” (Eph. 6:4). After St. Paul’s revolutionary action of addressing women at the beginning of his
 505 household code, you might wonder why he doesn’t include mothers in his exhortation here. Commentators are quick to point out that what St. Paul says here applies to mothers as well, which is true, but it still doesn’t explain their absence.

I would suggest a knowledge of ancient culture is once again useful here. Ancient fathers tended to be uninvolved when it came to the raising of their
 510 children. The care of children²⁹ was the purview of the mother (who in wealthier

²⁷ The Roman general Pompey was called weak for being in love with his wife Julia.

²⁸ For more information on this I’d recommend the book *Love, Marriage, and Family: Learning from the Early Christians* by Pr. Erkki Koskenniemi. He delves into how these topics were understood in the world of Greek and Roman antiquity, examines how the Early Church dealt with this and makes comparisons about how the 21st century church might approach it as well. As technical as all this sounds the book is only about 130 pages and a very easy read.

²⁹ O good, more ancient culture. The ancient world did not recognize what we would call a “teenager”; you were a child, or you were an adult. For boys this distinction happened around 12 or 13 at the discretion of

families often delegated that role to nurses and nannies). By the time boys were around five or so they would be entrusted to a pedagogue, who would get them to school and attend to their daily needs. It wasn't uncommon for a father's contact with his children to be infrequent, and often wouldn't have daily contact with his
 515 sons until they were of an age to enter public life.

So when Paul writes "Fathers, bring up your children in the training and admonition of the Lord" he is explicitly telling them to be involved in the lives of their children. To take a personal role in their education and upbringing, especially their spiritual upbringing.

520 Sad to say, modern husbands and fathers are often in need of this explicit instruction as well. It is easy for us to fall into the trap of seeing the raising of children - especially infants and young children - as primarily the mother's role. And granted, to a great extent it is, because God designed women for this role. But as St. Paul points out it is not a role He intended for them to play alone. As
 525 children get older a father's role should be increasing, especially with boys. It is easy to tell ourselves that we work hard all day, so that when we get home we are going to take time to relax. Sure, I'll do something with the kids for a bit, maybe read a story, but after that half hour I've got some other things in mind.

And truth is, you probably do work hard, you do need to rest, and a break
 530 when you walk into your home is a good thing. But that need for rest should not become an excuse to selfishness at the expense of your wife and children.

your father. For girls it happened at menstruation, i.e. when they were able to get pregnant. Until then you were a child.

As far as suggestions go I can give none better than Plan to spend time with your children. Mentally – or even explicitly on a calendar – block off times that are specifically for spending with your family. Or decide on activities that will be

535 Activities done with Dad. My father took me running with him and taught me to play tennis, and I still associate those activities with him. I read with my daughter, when she was little we would go to parks, and because she grew up in Tacoma we often visited coffee shops together. Pick an activity, pick a time, and be with them. Children notice your presence and they notice your absence. There are going to be

540 times when you need to be absent, so you want to make those the exception, not the rule.

And as a teacher I'll give one more suggestion: Be involved in your child's education. If a father is showing up at parent-teacher conferences I can all but guarantee that child is doing well in school. With one exception, every high-

545 performing student I've ever had has had a father who touched base with me, asked about his child's progress and made sure I had his contact information. So be the one who helps with and/or checks homework.³⁰ Be the contact email for the teacher. Go to parent teacher conferences. Trust me, it will pay dividends in the scholarships your child will be receiving.

³⁰ For his whole life I never knew my father to read fiction, with one exception: he read the books my nephews were reading in school. One in particular didn't really like reading, so my father would ask what they were reading for school, get a copy, read it with them, and talk to them about it when he saw them. Reading their novel was still homework, but now it was also time with grandpa. And my dad got to read some great fiction he'd otherwise had missed. So I'm passing this suggestion on to you. Eventually your children will be doing math or science you've forgotten, or will end up taking a language you don't speak, but you can always read their books and discuss them.

550

Upholding Fathers

The importance of fathers and the concept of fatherhood in the ancient world is hard to miss³¹, and its importance would be unquestioned up until the 1960's. Some of you experienced this transition first hand, evident in the tv shows you watched. Beginning in the 1960's the importance of the nuclear family was being questioned, and more recently the traditional importance of fatherhood has been questioned in academic essays like "Deconstructing the Essential Father"³² and books like *Absent Fathers*?³³. Last year for Father's Day *The American Spectator* published an article on what it called the "annual tradition of using the occasion to publish articles denigrating fathers"³⁴, including an article claiming "no fathers should be celebrated at all on Father's Day. Rather, mothers must be celebrated as the real heroes of Father's Day."³⁵

As Christians we decry these trends, but I don't know as we've done much besides that. A quick AI search for "Lutheran publications and articles on fatherhood or fathers" produced the titles of 15 Lutheran articles and publications that talk about fatherhood. When I did the same search for "...motherhood and mothers" it gave me a curated list of 22, and easily gave me 30 or so more each

³¹ See Appendix D on Fatherhood in Ancient Literature.

³² Louise Silverstein and Carl Auerbach, published in "American Psychologist" June 1999.

³³ Jonathan Bradshaw et al., published by Routledge, 1999.

³⁴ <https://spectator.org/a-tale-of-two-fathers-days-this-year-media-outlets-denigrated-fatherhood/>

³⁵ *ibid*

time I asked “can you give me more?” I quit after the fourth time doing this.³⁶ It is
 570 common to have special activities or customs in congregations on Mother’s Day,
 but what customs do we have on Father’s Day? I know, that is an unfair question
 to ask in the ELS, but a quick search of “special activities in WELS congregations
 for Father’s Day” and “...LCMS congregations for Father’s Day” got me to the
 WELS Church Locator and had a suggested prayer. Doing the same for Mother’s
 575 Day I found “Paint and Plate for Mother’s Day”, articles entitled “In Defense of
 Mother’s Day” and “For Mom” for the bulletin, some Bible studies, and a slew of
 nice pictures of congregational activities.

Or ask yourself the question, “How long would Synod Sunday have
 remained on the third Sunday in June if that were Mother’s Day”?

580 My point isn’t that we should do less for Mother’s Day, or that we should
 do more for Father’s Day, or that we need to move Synod Sunday, but to draw
 attention to the reality that if we measure importance by how much attention we
 give to something, an outside observer may not see the role of father as being all
 that important to our congregations.

585 I, of course, have suggestions. But I wonder if here it is better to ask some
 questions:

Does my congregation have activities that encourage men to gather?

Besides meetings or work days. Most congregations have groups for women, but I
 find groups for men to be rarer. I would encourage having a group or activity for

³⁶ There were none from ELS or WELS, but in fairness this is likely because the AI could not find articles from *The Sentinel* or *The Northwestern Lutheran/Forward in Christ* online.

590 men, and in my opinion the more low-stakes the better, because you need the low-
stakes before you can get to the high-stakes. Ask a guy to come to the men's book
club where we're reading *The Iliad* or *The Book of Concord* and you're likely to get a
lot of "We'll see," and you can hardly blame him because what you're really
595 asking is "How would you like to give up some of your free time and do some
work?" Ask him to come because we're going to go shooting, or hit some golf
balls, or have some cigars and bourbon and he hears all he has to do is show up
and relax. Gatherings like this allow men to get to know each other, which opens
the door for the conversation and consolation of the brethren, i.e, the high-stakes.

Does my congregation have a day or activity that highlights fathers? We
600 had a kindergarten teacher who did Donuts With Dad a couple times a year. I
know congregations that have sponsored Father-Daughter dances, and ones that
had a day where fathers and sons got to display shared hobbies. I'm sure y'all will
have suggestions for this as well, but notice it does two things: It sends the
message that fathers are important, and it allows men to gather in a low-stakes
605 environment.

Am I, as a new or younger father, making time for my family? The first
time I saw my daughter I felt overwhelming love and fear at the same time. I felt
both the joy of meeting her for the first time and the dreadful realization that I was
now responsible for that person. I'm guessing every father in this room knows
610 what I'm talking about. It is different from the feeling after you get married. You
feel a need to provide for and protect your wife, but you also know she's an adult.

But your children; you need to make sure they have food to eat and clothes on their back.

And that responsibility of providing for your family weighs heavy on most
615 men. Most men I know, especially most fathers I know, are hard workers. They put in more than 40 hours and it's not to buy a boat. It's to make an extra house payment, or make sure their son can go on that class trip, or their daughter can play club soccer. To them, and to you, if you're one of them, I first want to say, Good job, Dad. I'm proud of you. You're doing great.

620 Then I want to say (again): Make sure you're making time for your family. As much as possible, be there in the evenings with them. Read stories, play Legos, make tacos with them. Have a day off and use it for a family activity, even if that activity is watching a movie. Because that time you spend with them is time you are raising and shaping them, showing them that you love them enough to spend
625 time with them, and showing them what it means to be a good father.

As an experienced father or grandfather, what am I doing to support younger fathers? One of the lessons I learned from my father was the importance of encouragement. Especially when I became a father I'd be talking to him on the phone, sharing stories, and after listening, his response was almost never to give
630 advice (unless asked). He would invariably say "Hey, Alex, you're doing good. I'm so proud of you." Talks with my siblings revealed that - unsurprisingly - they were experiencing this, too.

Encouragement is such a powerful tool. I've seen it with my own family and I've seen the effects in my classroom. Now I'm encouraging you to put it to
635 work in your families and congregation. Be scant with advice or critiques to younger fathers – unless asked – but be generous with encouragement. Target young families in your congregation, and especially on the days when their kids have been a bit disruptive in church, go to the dad, pat him on the back and say, “Hey, I'm so glad you are here with your family. I think you're doing a great job.”
640 It is some of the best support you can give to him.

St. Joseph, Guardian of Our Lord

645

Teaching literature, one question I like to ask when we finish a book is “Which character do you think was under-used?” or “Which character would you have liked to see developed more, or heard about more in the story?” If you ask me this question about the Bible the answer is easy: St. Joseph.

650 We hear so very little about Joseph. We hear about his encounter with Gabriel, then he is a silent participant in the Christmas story. He follows the command of God with the flight into Egypt and the return to Nazareth. Twelve years later he is part of the story of the boy Jesus in the temple, and then he disappears from the narrative.

655 And perhaps it is because we hear so little about him, but I would suggest
that Joseph is the best father we hear about in the Bible. He is the only father of
note in the New Testament, and what characterizes Joseph?

He listens to God. When God speaks to Joseph, Joseph listens and does
what is asked of him. And we should note that two of these times it is at personal
660 loss. He takes Mary as his wife even though many people likely thought Mary was
taking advantage of him, and thus he was a fool for marrying her. And when they
return from Egypt he does as God asks and takes his family to back to Nazareth.
Joseph no doubt had plenty of times when he must have wondered if God had
thought this plan through, and yet he willingly obeys.

665 **He loves and serves his family.** We know from St. Matthew 1 that when
Joseph found out about the pregnancy he was already inclined to not put Mary
through any public humiliation and break things off quietly.³⁷ And yet while he
had come to this decision he hadn't acted on it, he was still pondering the matter
when the angel appears to him. Why opt for the lesser punishment? And why not
670 act immediately? St. Matthew tells us this is because Joseph was a just man³⁸, but
justice alone would have allowed for a public stoning. Joseph loved Mary,
something that, as we've seen, cannot be taken for granted in ancient marriages.
I'd argue this love for Mary and Jesus also plays a part in his obedience to God's

³⁷ This is a *much* kinder act than we usually realize. When St. Matthew tells us that Joseph is divorcing Mary it means there was a marriage contract, and thus a *mohar*, a bride-price, is in play. Accusing Mary of adultery would have freed Joseph of the obligation of paying the *mohar*. His quiet divorcing means he was taking the blame for the cancellation **and** willing to pay the *mohar* required by the marriage contract. A just man indeed!

³⁸ δίκαιος.

instructions for the flight into Egypt and the return. Joseph wanted to act to
 675 protect his wife and child.

He is selfless. If you go back and sing all the hymns and carols from this
 past Advent and Christmas, you'll find they tell the entire Christmas story and
 reconstruct that familiar manger scene but with one glaring omission: Joseph will
 be absent. The animals are mentioned more than he is, which hardly seems a just
 680 arrangement for this just man.

It's unlikely Joseph had any special ability that allowed him to look into the
 future and see he wouldn't fare too well in Christmas carols, though if he had I
 don't think it would have changed his mind about fulfilling the role God had
 given him. In his every occurrence we see Joseph prioritizing his family over
 685 himself, content to serve.³⁹

Conclusion

Concerning the Fourth Commandment, Luther writes in his Large
 690 Catechism:

To the position of fatherhood and motherhood God has given
 special distinction above all positions that are beneath it: He
 does not simply command us to love our parents, but to honor
 them. Regarding our brothers, sisters, and neighbors in general,
 695 He commands nothing more than that we love them. In this
 way He separates and distinguishes father and mother from all
 other persons upon earth and places them at His side. For it is a
 far higher thing to honor someone than to love someone,

³⁹Another way your congregations can promote fatherhood is to commemorate St. Joseph. When his day (March 19) falls on a Sunday, observe it like you might Annunciation Sunday. However this does not happen very often, so my other suggestion is to use alternate propers at times for Advent 4, the Gospel lesson being the angel appearing to Joseph. Both of these give you a chance to preach specifically about fathers and fatherhood. See Appendix E.

700 because honor includes not only love, but also modesty,
 humility, and submission to a majesty hidden in them. Honor
 requires not only that parents be addressed kindly and with
 reverence, but also that, both in the heart and with the body, we
 demonstrate that we value them very highly, and that, next to
 705 God, we regard them as the very highest. For someone we
 honor from the heart we must also truly regard as high and
 great.

710 We must, therefore, impress this truth upon the young that they
 should think of their parents as standing in God's place. They
 should remember that however lowly, poor, frail and strange
 their parents may be, nevertheless, they are the father and
 mother given to them by God. Parents are not to be deprived of
 their honor because of their conduct or their failings. Therefore,
 715 we are not to consider who they are or how they may be, but
 the will of God, who has created and ordained parenthood.⁴⁰

Luther tells us to impress this upon the young, but I think especially that
 second paragraph is one we as fathers and mothers need to hear as well. There are
 few parents – few fathers – who read those paragraphs without feeling the weight
 of those words. More than our children, more than our wives, we know how
 720 lowly, poor, and frail we have been as fathers. We know how we have failed our
 wives and our children, and those failures loom larger in our memories than our
 successes.

But this is why we need to re-read that second paragraph. No matter how
 lowly, poor, and frail you have been in your role as father, no matter how many
 725 mistakes you have made you should take comfort first in the fact that God has

⁴⁰ Paul Timothy McCain, W H T Dau, & F Bente. (2009). *Concordia : The Lutheran Confessions: A Reader's edition of the Book of Concord*. CPH. p. 397.

given you those children. He made you father of that family. He put you there, with divine wisdom decreed you are the right man for the job, and God tends to know what He is doing. So do not deprive yourself of this honor because of your conduct or failings. You are there by the will of God.

730 And that same God also wills to forgive you for all your lowly, poor, and frail actions. More valuable than the camaraderie of other men, more beneficial than the support of other fathers is the forgiveness found in the work of the Everlasting Father. Here is the One who took all your lowly, poor, and frail actions to the cross, who washed away all those sins in baptism, who now always hears
735 your prayers and who continues to selflessly serve you and your family. For after all, you are now part of His family. You are not just fathers, *“you are sons, [for] God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ”* (Galatians 4:6-7).

740 O Blessed Lord Jesus, who grew up in an earthly home, obedient to Your earthly parents: Bless the homes of Your people. May fathers lead their families with selfless love, may all parents be blessed with the spirit of understanding and wisdom; may all children love, obey, and support their parents, and bring us all at
745 last to the joy of our heavenly home. Amen.

Appendix A – Paul Quotes the Pagans

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Accessed at <https://cdn.bakerpublishinggroup.com/processed/essourceassets/files/1835/original/10.26>.

Acts_17.2728__Paul_Quotes_the_Pagans.pdf?1524575512

Acts 17:27-28 – Paul Quotes the Pagans

In Acts 17, Paul quotes from two pagan poets and philosophers when addressing an audience in front of the Areopagus in Athens:

[God] is not far from each one of us. For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said,

“For we too are his offspring.” (Acts 17:27-28)

First Quote: “In him we live and move and have our being”

No text containing these words has survived from antiquity, but Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and other authorities attributed the line to Epimenides, a seventh- or sixth-century-BCE philosopher-poet.

In the early twentieth century, a ninth-century Syriac commentary on the book of Acts was discovered that contained the full quote from the text of Epimenides, which apparently was available to the author of that work at that time. The context seems to be an error (or “lie”) on the part of Cretans who, by building a tomb for Zeus, failed to recognize that the god was immortal.

They fashioned a tomb for you, holy and high one,
Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies.
But you are not dead: you live and abide forever,
For in you we live and move and have our being.

Of special note is the fact that this one stanza of ancient poetry is actually quoted *twice* in the New Testament. Paul cites the concluding line in Acts 17:28, while Paul’s letter to Titus alludes to the second line in a completely different context:

It was one of them, their very own prophets, who said,
“Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons.” (Titus 1:12)

Second Quote: “We too are his offspring”

Paul indicates that this line is something that more than one Greek poet has said, and we do possess two texts that contain similar lines:

All the streets and all the market places
of humanity are full of Zeus.
Also full of him are the sea and the harbors,
and everywhere we all have need of Zeus.
For we are also his offspring.

– Aratus of Soli in Cilicia, *Phaenomena* 2-51

The beginning of the world was from you,
and with law you rule over all things.
To you all flesh may speak,
for we are your offspring.
Therefore I will lift a hymn to you
and will sing of your power.

– Cleanthes, *Fragment 537*, “Hymn to Zeus”²

Both Aratus and Cleanthes were Stoic philosophers, fourth to third centuries BCE.

1. Quoted in Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 362.
2. Quoted in Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament*, 362.

Appendix B – Home Devotions

Fear Not!

You knew this topic was going to appear somewhere in this paper. And it should; a devotional life should be part of every Christian home. But “home devotions” is also one of those phrases that almost always produces feelings of inadequacy and guilt.

That is not my goal. So first of all, full disclosure, I was not the best when it came to home devotions. We started them a number of times, usually around Advent because we got to use the candles, but they always died off and then I would feel guilty and eventually start them again, usually next Advent or Lent.

But what I was good at was reading, singing, and listening. We read Bible stories when my daughter was little. I often sang hymn stanzas to her when she was little and later we sang them together. And I was good at listening, so I would listen to memory work. At least, until I became her teacher, then the practice of listening fell to mom.

So that is my encouragement to you. In my experience what causes the most anxiety and guilt about home devotions is the idea they need to be either mini-church at home, or mini-Bible study at home, or both. It is better to think of them as devotional time with your family focused on reading, singing, and listening. Devotions need be neither long nor involved, in fact I'd say it is usually better if they are simple and brief.

With that in mind, here are some suggestions:

For Very Young Children (0-3) – Sing simple hymn stanzas and songs, and read Bible stories to them. When they are old enough, read Bible stories to them and ask them to find things in the pictures, i.e., the same thing you do reading *Little Blue Truck* or *Kitten's First Full Moon*. My best suggestion for Bible story books is *The Story Bible*, published by CPH. It is designed for children and young readers, has nice big, realistic pictures and emphasizes the Gospel in every story.

For Young Children (4-6) – Read Bible stories and sing hymns. Reading one Bible story or singing one hymn is a perfectly acceptable devotion for a family with young children. Don't feel as if you need to comment on the theology

of the story; I would read a Bible story the same way I'd read a secular book. Read the story and where appropriate ask children to answer questions. And by "answer questions" I mean "What is Jesus riding in the picture?" "Does Peter look happy or sad?" "Which one do you think is Martha?" Not "Which article of the Augsburg Confession would have helped Martha understand the role of good works in her life of faith?" The primary pedagogical goal at work here is to familiarize children with the stories. The main theological goal is not to learn some moral or theological lesson, but to learn something about Jesus and His love.

For Growing Children (7-13) – Time for them to read the Bible stories to you, and to pick hymn stanzas to sing. This will work great until they're about 10, but by then they're getting ready to start confirmation, and they certainly have memory work for that. Be the one who listens to the memory work and makes sure it is memorized. Again, I wouldn't worry about delving into the theology of each passage, but asking what they're learning the passage in connection with (i.e., what Bible story or what part of the catechism) is a good practice.

For Teens (13-18) – Teens are surprisingly spiritual creatures. Especially if you've given them a foundation of going to church, you'll be surprised how willing they are to talk about spiritual matters. They especially love to talk about moral topics. My first suggestion is to ask what books they're reading in school, what the story is about and its spiritual implications. You can also do this with current events. You might also think of delegating the reading of Bible stories to older siblings, asking them to read a Bible story to their younger sibling(s) before bed.

Appendix C – Aristotle’s Household Code

From Book 1 of Politics

Translation from perseus.tufts.edu

Of household management we have seen that there are three parts: one is the rule of a master over slaves, which has been discussed already, another of a father, and the third of a husband. A husband and father, we saw, rules over wife and children, both free, but the rule differs, the rule over his children being a royal, over his wife a constitutional rule. For although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female, just as the elder and full-grown is superior to the younger and more immature. But in most constitutional states the citizens rule and are ruled by turns, for the idea of a constitutional state implies that the natures of the citizens are equal, and do not differ at all. Nevertheless, when one rules and the other is ruled we endeavor to create a difference of outward forms and names and titles of respect, which may be illustrated by the saying of Amasis about his foot-pan⁴¹. The relation of the male to the female is of this kind, but there the inequality is permanent. The rule of a father over his children is royal, for he rules by virtue both of love and of the respect due to age, exercising a kind of royal power. And therefore Homer has appropriately called Zeus “father of Gods and men”, because he is the king of them all. For a king is the natural superior of his subjects, but he should be of the same kin or kind with them, and such is the relation of elder and younger, of father and son.

⁴¹In ancient Egypt, a military leader by the name of Amasis rebelled against King Apries. In spite of this victory, Amasis still had some major public relations issues that he was keen to resolve. As a usurper from an obscure background, the new king was seen by the nobility in Egypt as unrefined with no pedigree. So when the conceited courtiers visited King Amasis they were instructed to wash their feet in a golden footbath before appearing before the new ruler. In emergencies, the gilded pot was also used for other, messier, bodily functions.

One day, the golden footbath suddenly vanished. Around that same time, the king set his artisans and goldsmiths to work on making a brand-new statue that depicted a popular god. Amasis provided everything that the craftsmen needed, even going so far as to donate all of the gold. The idol of the god, when it was completed, reportedly left the Egyptian courtiers awestruck, and they flocked to admire and worship the masterpiece. When King Amasis learned that the new statue was receiving rave reviews, he called a meeting and revealed the fact that the deeply revered statue was once a foot-bath, in which they washed their feet, vomited, and used for a toilet. He went on to say that his own case was much the same, in that once he had been an ordinary person but was now their king; so that just as they had come to revere the transformed foot-bath, so they had better pay honor and respect to him too. In this way the Egyptians were persuaded to accept him as their master. (Summarized from an article by C. Keith Hansley at www.thehistorianshut.com)

Appendix D – Fathers and Sons in Ancient Literature

The Paper Almost You Got

It doesn't take too much reading of ancient literature to see how important the role of father was to the ancients. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, when Gilgamesh comes to Uruk one of his great offenses is that he disrupts families, but with the coming of Enkidu he begins to mature and grow, from bully to wise leader, until he is called the Father of His People.

The father-son relationship is impossible to miss in Greek epic. It is all over the Iliad: Achilles can be characterized as young man angry at his absent father, who sent him off with the instruction to "gain honor". He will think about this as he contemplates his unborn son Neoptolemus, from whom he will now be absent. He stands in contrast to Hector, who is a more mature and stable man, perhaps because his father was there to guide him. Priam begs his son Hector not to face Achilles, subordinating his role as king to his role as father. Before Hector heads out to face Achilles there is a tender moment with infant Astyanax. Hector laughs at the child's fear of his helmet, which humanizes him and foreshadows Priam's agony. When Hector is killed, Priam's grief is visceral – he throws himself in the mud and laments more for this son than others. The epic ends with Priam risking everything to ransom Hector's body from Achilles, and the two enemies end up weeping together, Priam evoking Achilles' own absent father Peleus.

The Odyssey spends even more time on this theme. While it is the story of Odysseus coming home from the Trojan War, running parallel to this is the story of Odysseus's son Telemachus, who we meet as a 20 year-old young man who has grown up without a father and because of this does not know how to act as a man. He is aimless and rather pathetic at the start of the story, and it takes Athena to prompt him and send him on his own journey. And where does she send him? To other men! Not even she – a goddess! – feels qualified to teach Telemachus how to be a man. Ultimately it takes the arrival of Odysseus for Telemachus to grow up, and the story ends with Odysseus, Telemachus, and Laertes standing together.

But the ultimate father-son story is The Aeneid. When Aeneas leaves the burning city of Troy it is holding his son's hand and carrying his father on his back. Where Odysseus is motivated by his own glory and avenging himself on the suitors, Aeneas is motivated by *pietas*: doing right by his family and the gods. He is often asking himself "How does this honor my father, and how does this improve the fortunes of my son?"

This doesn't even begin to touch on Aesop, Greek tragedies, Cicero's letters to his son, and other works. But I include this because they show the culture in which the Bible was first written and read, and so it sheds light on how the words of Jesus and St. Paul would have been heard.

Appendix E – Propers for St. Joseph

Propers for St. Joseph, Guardian of Our Lord (March 19)

Psalm 127 - “Unless the LORD builds the house....”

OT: 2 Samuel 7:4-16 - Nathan tells David to not build the Temple

Epistle: Romans 4:13-18 - The Promise granted through faith

Holy Gospel: St. Matthew 2:13-15 - The Flight into Egypt

Collect: Almighty God, from the house of Your servant David You raised up St. Joseph to be the guardian of Your incarnate Son and the husband of His mother, Mary. Grant us grace to follow the example of His faithful work in heeding Your counsel and obeying Your commands; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

Alternate Propers for Advent 4

Psalm 19 - “The heavens declare....”

OT: Isaiah 40:1-8 - “Comfort, comfort My people....”

Epistle: Hebrews 1:1-12 - Jesus is the Son of God

Holy Gospel: St. Matthew 1:18-25 - The Angel appears to Joseph

Collect: Stir up Your power, O Lord and come, and help us with Your great might, that whatever is hindered by our sins may be speedily accomplished by Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

Appendix F – The Reading List for Fathers

A subjective list, but I am a literature teacher, so....

The Odyssey, by Homer. We usually think of this as the story of Odysseus getting home, but it is just as much the story of Telemachus, the son of Odysseus. In fact the story opens with him and we see a young man who has grown up without a father and the effect that had on his life.

The Aeneid, by Virgil. At its heart, the *Aeneid* is the story of a man with a destiny. But the implications of that destiny heavily affect his family. I mean, he begins his journey carrying his father and his back and holding the hand of his son. The stakes are higher when we realize it is a destiny he must pass on to his son, and so you have a hero who often questions his worthiness as a son and a father.

To Kill a Mockingbird, by Harper Lee. One of the questions my students are used to hearing is “What is the flaw in this character? How do they grow?” Atticus Finch tends to stump them because he seems a perfect character. But his flaw is a hard one for teenagers to see. Read this as a father and see Atticus as a man grieving the death of his wife and struggling with the question of how to be a father to his children.

Frankenstein, by Mary Shelley. One of the most important themes of this novel is parent-child relationships. What duties do parents have to the children they bring into the world? Are there circumstances that allow them to neglect or forsake those duties? What are the duties of children? And I wonder if any of the novel was influenced by Mary’s close relationship with her father, later strained by his second wife so that at 16 – against her father’s wishes – she has a relationship with Percy Shelley and runs off with him to France?

The One-In-A-Million Boy, by Monica Wood. The protagonist of the novel is a 104 year-old woman, but a theme that runs throughout the novel is how a couple deals with the sudden death of their son. The book is well-written enough that I’ve thought of reading it with my high schoolers, but never have because I think you need to be a parent to begin to appreciate the story.

Lonesome Dove, by Larry McMurtry. Aside from being a modern epic about the death of the old west, two of the major storylines are about fathers and sons, both of which invite questions about the role of fathers in the lives of their children. It expands on the themes of *Frankenstein* asking What duties do husbands owe to their wives, and fathers to their children? And are there circumstances that allow them to neglect or forsake those duties? The book is also a great one for exploring male friendship.

The Chosen by Chaim Potok. A pick suggested by my daughter, who says: "I recently read it for Well-Read Mom, really enjoyed it, and occasionally still think about it. Undoubtedly, its primary theme is the relationship between fathers and sons, and their influence on one another. Set during WWII, the story follows two adolescent Jewish boys in New York who form an unlikely friendship. Though they're both raised in the Jewish faith, their fathers pass that faith down in drastically different ways, and the boys navigate complicated questions surrounding their faith and their respective fathers. As a reader, you feel deeply the boys' frustration at their fathers' decisions and teachings. At the same time, you get glimpses into the real struggles the fathers are going through in deciding how to best raise their children. If anything, the story is a moving exercise in empathy for children (particularly sons) toward their fathers, and vice versa."

An Odyssey, by Daniel Mendelsohn. Daniel Mendelsohn is a professor of humanities at Bard College in New York. The book is the true story of his retired, engineer father taking his son's seminar on *The Odyssey* and clashing with some of his son's interpretations of the story. The two end up taking a cruise that retraces Odysseus' journey and learning to better understand each other.

Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters, by Meg Meeker. I don't know who gave me this book, but I am grateful to them and it is one I now recommend to every father, especially fathers of girls. The author explains the role fathers play in the lives of their daughters and gives practical suggestions for being a "strong father" in their daughter's life.