

Three Fathers, Three Lessons

1. Warm-up Question: Which TV father comes closest to approximating your own Dad? Options might include: Andy Griffith, Mike Brady, Dr. Huxtable, Ward Cleaver, Homer Simpson, Walter White, Ned Stark, or Gomez Adams. ☺
2. On a more serious level, which of the following answers comes closest to describing your Dad? When you share your answer, also tell us how you would describe him in three sentences or less.
 - a. My Dad was/is pretty wonderful.
 - b. My Dad was/is a complex mixture of good and bad.
 - c. My Dad was/is pretty bad.
 - d. My Dad was/is largely absent from my life.
3. On Sunday, Jeff told how his neighbors' incredible flowerbeds inspired him to try to create something similar on a smaller scale in his own yard. That's the power of influence. Fathers have a profound influence on us – for better or worse. So do mothers, aunts, uncles, mentors, teachers, coworkers, etc. God has given each of us the power to influence and to be influenced. Share a recent example of how someone (anyone) has influenced you in a large or small way.
4. Fathers come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from heroic to awful to somewhere in between. Fathers in the Bible also run the gamut. On Sunday, we started with a wonderful father who was described by Jesus in one of his most famous parables. Read Luke 15:11-32.
 - a. In verse 12, the son asks to receive his portion of his father's inheritance early and his father agrees. Why do you think the father agreed? Was he foolish or wise? What do we learn about God from the father's example in verse 12? What do we learn about parenting (and dealing with others) from the father's example?
 - b. Verses 20-24 are the heart of the story, describing the father's response when his wayward son returned home. What do we learn about God from the father's example? What do we learn about parenting (and dealing with others) from the father's example?
 - c. Think about a time when either you did something really bad or stupid. How did your parents react? How did their reaction affect you?
 - d. Think about a time when your child (or someone else close to you) did something really bad or stupid. How did you react? How do you think your reaction affected them?
5. Jacob was the second father we considered on Sunday. From what the Bible tells us, he was a pretty bad father. On his deathbed, when it came time to bless his sons, he actually cursed two of them. Read his words at Genesis 49:5-7.

- a. Apparently Simeon and Levi were pretty terrible guys and had some serious behavioral issues. How do you think their father's words affected them?
 - b. Suppose instead Jacob had said something like, "Simeon and Levi, you've let anger and violence hijack your life. But I choose to believe in you and that a day is coming when you will finally master your impulses, become kind and gentle, and be a blessing to many people." How might those words have affected them?
 - c. In the ancient world, people believed words could actually influence the future. Do you? Why or why not?
 - d. Think about a time when your parents (or someone important to you) said something hurtful or something wonderful to you. What did they say? How did it affect you?
 - e. Jeff showed a video clip of a little boy and his Daddy saying goodbye one morning. The little boy kept saying, "Daddy, I love you." And his Dad kept saying, "I love you, Sunshine." As you watched the video, what thoughts, feelings, or insights arose within you? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTzrrlh2BW8>
6. King David was the third and final father we considered on Sunday. You might think it would be great to have a Bible hero for a father. But it turns out that David was a very complex mixture of good and bad. Sometimes he set a sublime example for his children; other times the exact opposite. For a positive example, read II Samuel 16:5-14. For a negative example, read II Samuel 11:2-15.
- a. Do you think David was a good or bad influence on his children? If he had been your father, do you think you would have admired him? Why or why not?
 - b. Jeff said, "Some fathers are amazing; some are awful. But most (like my Dad) are like King David – a complex mixture of good and bad, capable of soaring acts of grace alongside tragic mistakes. I choose to learn from my Dad's mistakes, even as I celebrate his triumphs. Keep it realistic. Love your Dad for who he is, as God does." What are your thoughts as you reflect on that statement?
 - c. Tell us about something wonderful your Dad has done that inspires you.
 - d. Tell us about something tragic your Dad has done that disappointed you. What did you learn from that?
 - e. To us who are parents, Jeff said, "You're never going to be perfect. So stop beating yourself up. Just stay focused on continuing to grow, while also knowing your kids can learn important lessons even from your failures." If you're a parent, what's something wonderful you hope your kids can learn from you? What's something important you hope they've learned from one of your big mistakes?
 - f. In closing, what one word best describes how you're feeling about your Dad right now? Briefly explain the word you choose.