

FOUR DUTIES OF A DAD

1 CORINTHIANS 4:14-16

I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.

For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

Therefore I urge you, imitate me...

In this morning's text Paul describes his feelings for the believers in the church at Corinth. He considers them his spiritual children - *his kids in Christ*. Paul loves these Christians like a father loves his children.

He says the Corinthians have 10,000 teachers, but they only have one spiritual father - *which is Paul*.

Certainly, the apostle's intent here is not to preach a Father's Day message, but his words do provide us a portrait of a father's heart. His approach to the church should be every father's attitude toward his kids.

Over a lifetime, a person might have many teachers, but if they have a good father, they are truly blessed.

Social commentator, David Blankenhorn, writes about life in the new millennium, "**Fatherlessness is the most destructive trend of our generation.**"

Today, nearly 20 million American children live in fatherless homes. More specifically, 23.6% - nearly a quarter of all kids live in a home where dad is absent.

And the results are devastating and far-reaching...

Fatherless children are six times more likely to live below the poverty line as kids in homes where dad is present... Some 43% of state prison inmates grew up in fatherless homes... Young ladies living without a father are twice as likely to become teenage mothers...

Children in fatherless families are more vulnerable to ills like dropping out of school, joblessness, drug addiction, suicide, mental illness, and sexual abuse.

And realize, **fatherless homes are not just homes without fathers**. Just because you and your kids have the same address, and live under the same roof - it doesn't mean they aren't living in a fatherless situation.

Author, C. R. Snyder, provides an illustration that hammers home this point. He talks about two parents he observed on separate airplane flights...

First, was Jenny and her dad. Snyder figured Jenny to be about three years old. It was her first time on an airplane, and dad was as excited about it as she was...

He explained to Jenny the loud noise at takeoff came from the engines. As the force pushed them back in their seats, dad whispered, "**Honey, I'll hold your hand.**"

Once airborne, Jenny and Dad chatted the whole trip. He even took her on a stroll around the cabin, pointing out items of interest. When the plane began its descent, Jenny got scared. Her daddy comforted her with a big hug, and explained what was happening.

It was obvious she trusted him wholeheartedly.

But Snyder also tells of another flight and a different parent and child. Teddy was also three years-old. And after dad buckled him into his seatbelt, he ordered him, "Now sit here and be quiet. Daddy's going to sleep."

And sleep he did... *for the whole trip*. At times the little boy was noticeably frightened, but his dad was oblivious to his fears. He ignored his child's thoughts, and needs, and questions. No words or touches were exchanged. In a real sense, **Teddy was flying alone**.

Dad, just because you sit in the seat next to your kids at breakfast, or sleep in a room down the hall, it doesn't mean they aren't growing up in *a fatherless situation*. **How many kids today are flying alone?**

That having been said... let me assure you, my goal today is not to *bash dads*. I want to encourage dads...

Yes, all dads can improve their fathering skills, but the fact you're there - involved in your children's life, trying to be a good dad - needs to be commended. Dads today need help and support - not condemnation.

A USA Today survey of men showed that 71% agreed - **the job of being a father is more difficult today than a generation ago**. And 72% of those men felt they were doing worse, or no better, at the task than their dad - *a tough admission for the male ego*.

Take the pulse of men today, and you'll discover that fatherhood is characterized by frustration and failure.

Dads, let me be the first to admit we all make mistakes. There are no perfect dads. We forget “Charles Ingalls” and “Cliff Huxtable” were both a myth.

The only perfect Father is named “God.”

It's easy *to father a child*, but it takes a lot of wisdom and effort *to be a father*. Perhaps you thought a dad's job was to help his kids grow-up - but equally so, it's the children who often cause us dads to grow-up...

Just in time for Father's Day, I've got for you a Top Ten list that proves my point... *"The Top Ten things I learned from my kids that I didn't really want to know..."*

10) A screaming four year-old's voice is louder than two-hundred adults in a crowded restaurant.

9) When you throw a baseball into a spinning ceiling fan, the blades can hit the ball a long way, and generate enough force to break a window.

8) When you hear the toilet flush, followed by the words “uh-oh” - it's already too late.

7) Legos pass through the digestive tract of a three year-old.

6) The words “Play-Doh” and “microwave” should never be used in the same sentence.

5) Old MacGyver re-runs can teach a child many things he doesn't need to know.

4) Peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches should never be stuffed in a person's back pocket.

3) Rocks in a gas tank will make lots of noise.

2) The spin cycle on a washing machine does not make earth worms dizzy. It does make cats dizzy - and a dizzy cat will throw up twice its body weight.

1) Quiet does not necessarily mean all is okay.

Fathers learn from their kids, as much if not more, than they teach them. At times a dad wonders if he's doing his kids any good. But dad, don't underestimate the impact you're having on your child's life! Even a father with faults is crucial to his child's success in life.

A February 1995 US News cover story, "[Why Dads Count](#)", opened with a bold thesis, "[Dad is destiny. More than virtually any other factor, a biological father's presence in the family will determine a child's success and happiness... Rich or poor, white or black, the children of divorce and those born outside marriage struggle through life at a measurable disadvantage.](#)"

It reminds me of the biblical example of the sons of Korah. They were Levitical priests who penned a psalm of praise, Psalm 44. It opens, "[We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what deeds You did in their days...](#)" These sons glorify God because their fathers left them a legacy of faith.

Dad, your children are trying to watch the parade called "*life*," and they're just little guys. They're small and short - and can't see over the temptations, and distractions, and contradictions that line the path.

The only way they can really see it all - the *hand of God at work* and the *plan of God in action* - is for you to stand tall in your faith with them on your shoulders!

Make no mistake about it, nobody can take the place of the man a child calls "dad." As Paul told the Corinthians, "For though you might have ten thousand instructors... yet you do not have many fathers..."

If you're a dad realize you occupy a strategic place in your child's life. Other men might influence - *coaches, friends, bosses, mentors, role models* - but none will come close to impacting your kids the way you will.

One author writes, "When a child is born, a father is born... The delivery doctor holds up something roughly the size of a loaf of bread for him to see for the first time. Even if he abandons it forever ten minutes later, the memory will nag him to the grave. He has seen the creation of the world. It has his mark upon it. He has its mark upon him. Both marks are, for better or worse, indelible." Father and child are permanently connected.

A father has an important position on the team. And there's nobody on the bench totally capable of taking his place. **A dad is more needed than he knows!**

And a dad is needed for more than what's commonly expected. I found the following lists of duties for a *gym dad*, a *cheer dad*, and a *swim dad*. I've been one of the three - a *cheerleader's dad* - and I would agree...

Here are a dad's duties: **pay, clap, drive**. For a cheer dad, a gym dad, and a swim dad - *they're not always in this order, but they're all the same: pay, clap, drive*.

If I were laying out for you **the four duties** of a cheerleader dad it'd be: **drive, pay, clap, pay**... You need a car, money, enthusiasm, then more money.

But Paul, in his analogy in 1 Corinthians 4, deals with a different set of duties. He's concerned about what we provide our kids spiritually. How Paul cared for the Corinthians is how a godly dad should care for his kids.

Here Paul reveals *the four duties of a godly dad...*

First, love them. Paul refers to them as "my beloved children." You could say, he **warms them** with his love.

Second, he **warns them**. He loves them enough to confront them with truth and bring needed correction.

Third, Paul **wants good things** for the believers in Corinth. He tells them in verse 16, "I urge you..." He motivates them to be all God has made them to be!

And **fourthly** he provides an example. He **walks before them** and exhorts his spiritual children, "mimic what I do, become what I am." "I urge you, imitate me."

Here're **the four duties of a dad**: He **warms** his kids with love. He **warns** them with sound advice. He **wants** God's best for them, and urges them on - as he **walks** before them, an example for them to imitate.

A good dad *warms, warns, wants, and walks...*

A fourth grade class was asked to write a paper on their hero. One little boy wrote about his dad. When he took the paper home, his father was so proud that he was his little guy's hero. But when the father asked his son why he picked him, the little guy answered, "Because, I couldn't spell Arnold Schwarzenegger."

Dads, if you **warm them**, and **warn them**, and **want for them**, and **walk before them**... I promise you that one day they'll look at you and call you their hero.

The first duty of a dad is to **warm** his kids with love.

Now, if you're the father of an infant you're thinking, "*Sandy, you've got to be kidding, how elementary can you get. What father needs to be told to love his kids? Of course we're going to love our kids.*" And you'll go home today, pick up that little baby, hear him coo, feel him cuddle - and your love will grow by the second.

But just wait until that precious little baby logs a few years, and starts turning up his nose at you and spewing backtalk. *You heard of the **terrible twos**?*

Well, the term was coined by a parent whose child didn't make it to three...*because it only gets worse...*

The *terrible twos* become the *defiant fives*, then the *sarcastic sevens*, then the *whiney nines*, and the *testy tens* - and then the child becomes a teenager...

And your little baby is no longer cooing and cuddling, he's bucking, and kicking, and running crazy. Trust me, at that point, loving your kids is more of a challenge.

One year, my oldest son, Zach and I, attended the Masters Golf Tournament and bumped into a guy from **Missouri**, "*the show-me state.*" He was impressed that I had been given two of the hardest tickets to obtain in sports, and had chosen to give one to my teenage son.

He told Zach, "**Wow, your dad must really love you.**"

Then the fellow said to me, "Anybody can love their kids when they're little and cute, but don't say you love your children until they become teenagers. Then if you tell me you love them, it really means something."

Dad, when your kids reach their teen years they've now been around long enough to disappoint you and embarrass you - and say mean things to your wife - and even lose a few of your tools in the backyard.

They're not as lovable as they once were, or as deserving of your love, *but they don't need it any less!*

Read all of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. This was a church full of selfish, divisive, arrogant, worldly, argumentative, and defiant people... *carnal Christians*.

You could call these believers **spiritual adolescents**.

They questioned Paul's authority and thought they knew more than he did. Paul could've written, "**You ungrateful, inconsiderate, spoiled bunch-of-brats**" - and it would've been fitting. Instead, Paul remembers he too is leaning on God's grace. He's also a recipient of a love he doesn't deserve. Paul is likewise a beneficiary of God's patience and forgiveness - so he calls them "***my beloved children.***" He **warms them** with love.

Even teenagers are worth loving. As one parent put it, "**Teenagers are like watermelons - hard and green on the outside, but soft and tasty on the inside.**"

Teenagers are still edible and digestible. You can have a relationship with one - it just takes more effort.

You've got to get past the rind, and spit out a few seeds - *but love will find a way!*

Parents always remember love is like water. **Love always flows downward.** Our love for God is never as strong as His love for us. In the same way, I don't love my parents as much as they love me. And likewise, my child's love for me will never eclipse my love for them...

So don't expect it to - and don't withhold your love when you find out it's not always reciprocated. Just keep loving them. If your relationship with a child is in the deep freeze - warm it up with a show of *your* love.

The second duty of a dad is to **warn** his kid.

The point of both Paul's Corinthian letters was to sound a warning. The believers were being deceived and led astray. Paul loves them enough to **warn them.**

And this is a father's job. It's tough, but necessary. Dad, **at times your place is in your kid's face.**

Bill Maher hosts the TV show, *Politically Incorrect*. I disagree with most of Bill's views, but in one interview he was asked, "**Were you and your dad good friends?**"

He answered, "**Friends? We're friends now, but while growing up I didn't need my dad to be my friend. I needed him to be my dad. This idea of dads getting mushy, and being friends is overblown. Dads are suppose to be the guy who tells you right from wrong!**"

Today, all four of my kids are out of the house and on their own - *and yes, we're friends.* All along I did stuff with them, to

cultivate our current friendship. But there were days when I had to make a choice between being their dad and being their friend. I couldn't be both.

Friends advise, comfort, empathize - but dads put their foot down - *they say "no" and mean it* - they ruffle feathers, and at times create tension. A dad doesn't mind the heat. A loving father knows the importance of showing courage, and exercising discipline, and doing what's best for his kids in the long run. A father has to always remember, **"I'm not running for re-election."**

Men, your kids will have a lot of friends in their lifetime, *but a friend isn't a father!* A dad has to step up and lead. God hasn't called you to walk with your child, side by side. You've been around. You know God, and His Word. *Father knows best!* You've been called to walk out-front - determine the course - set the pace.

Several years ago, one of my sons had football practice. Afterwards all three of my boys and I were walking across the field to our car, when the oldest says to me, **"Dad, why don't you take off your glasses and wrestle me. I think I can take you."** *"Oh, you think you can take me?"* I handed my glasses to his two astonished brothers, and in five seconds I had that guy on the ground in a full nelson, rubbing his face in the grass. *He had underestimated the old man!*

Of course, it was all in fun, but there have been other struggles with my children that were no fun at all.

They were draining and agonizing. With four kids, close in age, there was a season in our family life when wrestling matches were a constant occurrence.

Teenagers like to assert their independence - which is good. But a parent's job is to insist that privilege and responsibility goes hand in hand. You don't get the privilege without also taking on the responsibility

If I know nothing else about child-rearing, I know one thing... **dad needs to win the battles!** Kids need to know who is the boss, and that it's not them! Every child needs a dad who's not afraid to be in charge.

When God judged the high priest, Eli, He told the prophet Samuel, "I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he **did not restrain them.**"

Eli allowed his son's rebellion to go unchecked.

Maybe he thought, "If I come down too hard on my boys now, I'll lose them forever." But the opposite occurred. *Because he didn't come down hard on them he ended up losing them!...* God had to judge them.

Kids are extremely forgiving. They're willing to forget our mistakes - but the one thing they won't forgive us for is cowardice. They'll go elsewhere for strength.

You'll never gain your kid's respect if you wimp out and don't lead. Kids don't want to be bullied, but neither do they want to be left to themselves. They want parents who care enough to offer them guidance.

The third duty of a dad is to urge on his kids. He **warms them** with His love. He **warns them** about the dangers around them. But he also **wants for them**.

Some kids are self-motivated, but most kids need some form of external motivation. They need a gentle nudge at times. The Corinthians gave into temptation and compromise. They were content to be mediocre, carnal Christians. They lost *the want, the desire*, to grow spiritually. **And Paul had to want it for them!**

When faced with obstacles human nature usually opts for the path of least resistance. We have to be taught that obstacles shouldn't always be bypassed.

Some mountains need to be climbed - some walls broken down. *Often, our desire determines our destiny*. And a dad's job is to encourage and motivate his child.

This is where my dad excelled. He believed in his sons. He encouraged my brother and I to set our sights high. He taught us to never say the word *"can't."*

To this day he honestly thinks I could've played professional ball if I'd pursued it with my whole heart.

Whatever I was playing football, or basketball, or baseball my dad would be in the stands - *and I always knew where he was sitting*. In the times when I was exhausted, and ready to give up - I would look at him and he'd be giving me the signal (**pump my arm**).

It was his sign for me to turn it on! Dad, was always pulling for us, hoping for us, nudging us onward - always encouraging us to go farther, and do better!

I'll never forget the day I was showing off on my bike.

We lived on a steep hill, and I was riding down the street standing on its banana seat. I was street surfing, until I hit a bump, and the whole rig - bike and me went airborne. I landed on the street, rolling and skidding across the pavement - for probably thirty feet - like a rock skipping across a lake. I scraped the skin off my stomach, my back, and both my legs. I was a mess.

Mom spent all afternoon nursing and bandaging my wounds... But when dad got home he marched me outside, and made me climb right back on that bike.

I didn't think I could walk, but dad knew the importance of getting back on the horse that bucks you off. I didn't have to ride the bike long - but he made me ride it long enough to keep a fear from taking root.

It's possible for a father to push his kids *too hard*. He can establish impossible expectations they can never be met. It's a common mistake for a conflicted father to try and fulfill his own personal dreams through his kids.

But it's just as wrong for a dad not to provide the right motivation at the right time. Without it your kids may never become what they themselves really want to be. Dad, there're times you have *to want it for them*.

One day I came home from work, and was met at the back door by my youngest son, Mack. He was five years old at the time. He grabbed my hand and led me to a picture hanging from a magnet on the refrigerator.

It was his masterpiece. Faces were green, the sky was orange, clouds were brown, grass was red, but he was proud of his art. *He was looking for my approval...*

And I made a big deal of it, "*Son, I think this picture is a fabulous piece of art.*" After my rave review, a huge smile broke out across Mack's face. I'll never forget what he told me, "*Dad, I thought you'd say that!*" I was glad he expected support and affirmation from his dad.

In the course of their lifetime your children will have many critics. They need their dad to be their cheerleader. Successful dads dream for their kids, and in doing so, teach their kids how to realize their own dreams. Dad, they need you to **want it for them**.

While James Jordan was alive, his son, Michael, wanted his dad in the stands whenever he played basketball. Once a reporter asked Michael Jordan why he wanted his dad present at games, Michael replied, "*When dad is there, I know I have at least one fan.*"

That's amazing, 25,000 cheering fans can't provide as much motivation as a single father. Your child might have many fans, but there's no substitute for his dad.

Then the fourth duty of a dad is to **walk** - that is to live his life as an example to his children.

Paul was willing to be an example to the Corinthians. He says in verse 16, "*I urge you, imitate me.*"

His message was not like that of some fathers I know, "*do what I say, not what I do.*" Paul was an example to the Corinthians. He showed them the way.

Let me suggest, every dad is an example to his kids, *whether he wants to be or not*. Priorities rub off.

In family life, values are *caught* more than *taught*.

Dad, your kids will pick up your habits, and attitudes, and priorities whether you want them to or not.

I have an ugly habit. When I'm in the yard I like to spit. I enjoy a good spit! My wife hates it when I spit. But I don't even think about it - spitting is a yard habit.

Once when my kids were tots, I was outside with my two toddlers, Zach and Natalie. Kathy was on the porch. As we rounded the house, my wife saw it so clearly. I spit... Zack spit... Then my precious, little princess clears her throat and blows out a mighty wad.

I still remember my wife's lecture, "*Sandy, what are you teaching our daughter?*" And that's the question every dad needs to ask, "*what am I teaching my kids?*"

One of the ways my dad use to serve in our former church was as a Sunday night usher. Once after church I saw that my dad had a tear in his dress trousers - as well as a skinned knee and elbow.

Burglars had been hitting cars in the church parking lot, and it had been my dad's night to stand watch.

When he saw two guys breaking into a car he took out after them. They ran across the parking lot, jumped a wall, and vanished into the woods. Dad made it across the parking lot, but he tripped going over the wall, and went sprawling. In retrospect it was a good thing. He hadn't thought much as to

what he was going to do with the guys if he caught them... *but wow, did I admire his courage.* I'll never forget those torn pants.

Dad didn't think he'd done anything valiant, *but I did.*

I equated those torn pants with his commitment to Christ, and his dedication to our church. My dad had taken a risk to serve the Lord. He'd actually put himself in harms-way to fulfill his duty, and to serve others.

Those torn pants that night taught me a lot about serving the Lord, and it instructed me in a far more memorable way than another sermon would've done.

Dads, don't you think it's time to tear some pants in front of our kids? Don't expect your kids to embrace values to which you only pay lip service. We need to show them our dedication to what really matters.

Here's a poem entitled, "[The Better Way](#)," written by Edgar Guest, but it could've been written by your child.

"I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day; I'd rather one should walk with me, than merely show the way... The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear; fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear... and the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds, for to see the good in action is what everybody needs... I can soon learn how to do it if you'll let me see it done. I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run... and the lectures you deliver may be very wise and true, but I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do..."

For I may misunderstand you, and the good advice you give, but there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live." All dads need to understand that kids are attracted to an *active faith*, not a *passive faith*!

Dad, let me repeat it one more time just in case it hasn't clicked... **nobody can do for their child what a dad can do!** Sure, you fall short - sure, at times you slip up - but even with your faults - your kids need you.

Just being there, is so vitally important!

Let me put a wrap on my sermon with a funny story... An incident happened on the streets of East Hampton, New York. An 11 year old girl screamed, "**Daddy, Daddy, please don't sing, please don't sing.**"

I too have discovered this to be a great disciplinary tool with your children. If my kids weren't behaving, I would just threaten to sing in front of their peers.

A public musical performance by a parent is every child's worse nightmare. Try it and your child will shape up immediately. This tactic is guaranteed to get results.

But getting back to the incident in East Hampton....

What's ironic is that the little girl's dad is none other than the famous singer, Billy Joel. Millions of music fans are willing to pay big bucks to hear Billy Joel sing... but not his daughter, at least not at 11 years old.

Here's some great encouragement for dads...

If Billy Joel's daughter doesn't appreciate her father's singing - don't be surprised, dad, when your kids aren't

grateful for your fathering... Trust me, one day they'll see it differently - they'll thank you for all you did!...

So, keep **warming them** with your love.

Keep **warning them** with truth and wisdom.

Keep **wanting for them** all that God desires.

And keep **walking before them** as a godly example! For if you do, your kids will call you their hero!