Attributes of a Loving Father
Luke 15:11-24

Preface

Illus: Over 30 years ago before I was even married, I read a book by Joyce Landorf titled, “Tough & Tender.” The book encourages Christian men to be decisive and exhibit strength of character while showing sensitivity and gentleness as well. It describes how a good father learns how to make the hard choices and deal with challenges yet show love and compassion with his family; thus the title, “Tough & Tender.”

Men struggle with this balancing act every day. Men must be strong and committed to doing what is right and necessary. At the same time, men must show compassion and love.

Getting the right balance is seldom easy.

Of all the rich parables told by our Lord, none displays this like the one we are about to read.

Scripture

11 He also said: “A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.’ So he distributed the assets to them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living. 14 After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. 15 Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to eat his fill from the carob pods the pigs were eating, but no one would give him any. 17 When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I’ll get up, go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. 19 I’m no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired hands.’ 20 So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. 21 The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son.’

22 “But the father told his slaves, ‘Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let’s celebrate with a feast, 24 because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ So they began to celebrate. 25 “Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he summoned one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 ‘Your brother is here,’ he told him, ‘and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

28 “Then he became angry and didn’t want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 But he replied to his father, ‘Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.’

31 “ ‘Son,’ he said to him, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” Luke 15:11-24 HCSB

Introduction

We all know this story as “The “Parable of the Prodigal Son”. There is much to learn from the behavior of both sons. But there is far more for us to learn from the actions of the father.

The father in this parable is an amazing father. We have a lot of amazing fathers here in this room today.
Fathers get a bad rap these days. They are portrayed on TV as clueless and helpless; far from the true image of most fathers. Being a father is a tough job that challenges every man’s strength, courage, wisdom and patience. Men often carry tough burdens and too often keep their feelings bottled up inside.

Fathers are important to the family. Just as every father should teach his children to love their mother; every mother should teach her children to love and respect their father.

Repeat that statement – Even if the father is not living in the family because of divorce or separation. Your children deserve a father they can respect!

Today I would like for us to observe some notable attributes of the father depicted in this parable from our Lord. These are truly attributes of a loving father.

**1. Loving fathers make difficult choices.**

Obviously, this father was a farmer. Like any other business, the farm probably needed every asset it had to keep the farm productive. Letting go of some of the assets in any business is traumatic and destined to make operating the business much more difficult.

However, this father made the difficult decision to grant the younger son’s request. Certainly the father knew the son was being foolish and he probably predicted the outcome. But he also had the wisdom and courage to make the difficult choice.

He probably understood that his son was not going to let it go until he got his way. He most likely knew the younger son was not going to be productive around the farm until he learned some difficult lessons the hard way.

Any parent will tell you no two children are just alike. Sometimes it is hard to believe children come from the same parents when they are so different in the way they think and act. A loving father learns to make the difficult choices based on what is best for the child and the circumstances.

Fathers can’t be selfish in their decisions as they must be willing to sacrifice and make difficult decisions that are in the best interest of the family.

Illus: Snow skiing and realizing the consequences of getting hurt.

Fathers are faced with challenging decisions their entire life. Should I change jobs or am I risking too much. Is it wise to purchase this property or make this investment or will it hurt the family in the long run?

Fathers face the great burden of knowing they must provide for the family. It is hard on a man when he can’t give his family what they need and want.

Illus: Boy writes home to father, “Write more often even if it is just 5s and 10s.” Dreaded words, “We need money in our account.”

Loving fathers do not run from the challenges of parenting. They stand strong and make the difficult choices prayerfully.

**2. Loving fathers know how to show compassion.**

One thing that has always stood out to me in this parable is found in verse 20, “But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion.”

How did this father know to be watching on this day at this time for the son to return home? The answer is that he did not know to be watching. The father was watching every minute of every day. He never stopped looking for that son to come home.

This father’s heart was burning every day wondering about where his son might be and what difficulties he might be facing. This
father was anxiously waiting the day when he could see his son again and know he was ok.

When the father saw his son walking down that road, he knew the pride that was being swallowed. He knew his young son was coming home a defeated young man. He knew this young man had failure riding on his shoulders. But what did this father do? He showed compassion.

1. Children, obey your parents as you would the Lord, because this is right. 2. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life in the land. 4. Fathers, don’t stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:1-4 HCSB

A loving father never loses compassion for his children. Whether it is a child facing difficulty in school or sports or a grown child going through hardship, a loving father knows how to genuinely show compassion.

3. Loving fathers understand the power of forgiveness.

People often say there is nothing like a mother’s love. A mother’s love is not stronger than a father’s love. It is just displayed differently.

Most father’s love their children deeply and a father’s love never stops.

This father understood the humiliation his son must be facing. He chose not to add to humiliation and instead showed compassion and forgiveness. There would plenty time for discussing the mistakes and the future. But for the moment it was time to forgiveness.

In this parable, the father say’s “my son was lost but now is found; my son was dead but now is alive.” This gives us insight into the depth of the pain this father was feeling.

For this father, the pain in his heart was just as if his son were dead. But with all the pain and suffering this young man caused his father, notice the rejoicing when the boy came home.

In spite of the heartache children place upon their parents, fathers keep on loving and forgiving them. A loving father is constantly watching the road for their children to come home.

And when his children do make mistakes, he is there ready and willing to forgive.

Illus: In my own life, there have been times when my children have let me down or disappointed me. There have been times when I have been frustrated with their decisions or how they have spent their money and I vowed to not help them further. Then in just a matter of days I observed them needing help and what did I do? I reached out to help them. This often gets misconstrued as the child’s ability to persuade or sweet talk the father. In reality it is the father’s burning desire to forgive and help his children.

A loving father understands that forgiveness has a way of setting our children free. It lets them know that no matter how disappointed we are, we love them too much to not forgive.

Loving fathers understand the power of forgiveness.

Conclusion

Fathers don’t always have it easy. But I will tell you one way we do have it easy. We have our heavenly Father as an example.

We have a Bible full of lessons about the attributes and ways of God that we are to pattern ourselves after.

In this parable, the son’s father represents God himself and how God makes the difficult choices, how He shows compassion and how He forgives.

God is our example of how we should be as fathers.
Men don’t often show their emotions but they have emotions. We too are human beings and we feel the emotions and pain, we struggle with things just the same.

**Children**

Take the time to tell your father how much you love him and you appreciate him.

**Fathers**

Ask the most difficult question of all, “Am I the father God wants me to be?”

Illus: little boy who was playing on Sunday morning while Dad was in his recliner reading the paper. The father said: “Son, get yourself ready for Sunday School”. The little boy asked: “Are you coming with me today Daddy?” The man replied: “No, I’m not coming. But I want you to hurry up and get ready”. The little boy then said: “Did you used to go to Sunday School when you were a boy, Dad?” He said: “I most certainly did!” As the boy walked away the boy mumbled: “Yeah, and I bet it won’t do me any good either!”

Dad, are you the father God wants you to be?