

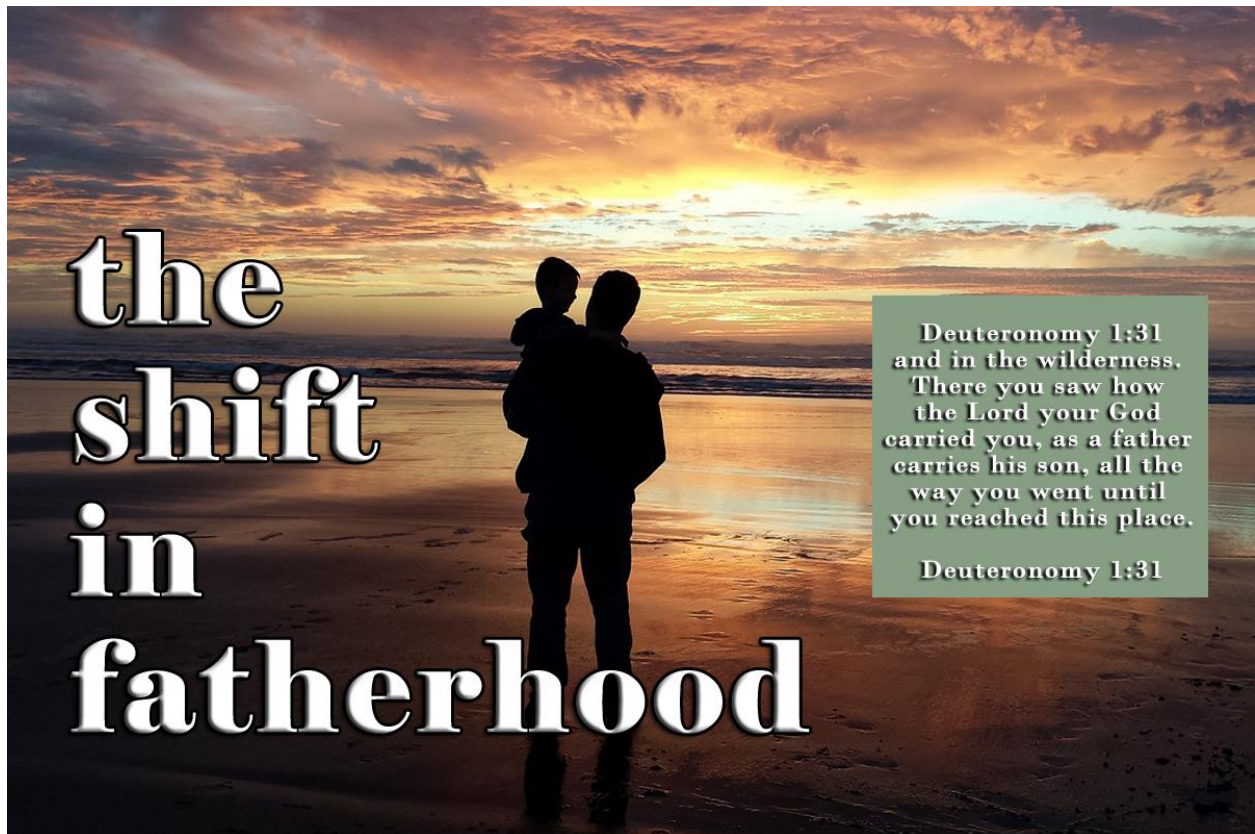
JUNE 18, 2023 FATHER'S DAY "The Shift in Fatherhood"

Deuteronomy 1:31

31 and in the wilderness. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place."

Special Music: My Boy Elvie Shane

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KCjIKSQFls>



TO BE LOVED AS A CHILD

I am no victim

I choose to believe as such

Though alone in the world

I remain untouched

By the lies and promises

Written in water

On tissue paper.

Neither am I son nor daughter

I am simply me.

Unworthy and unseen.

Ignored by

Every other human being.

The clothes I wear

Are borrowed

Hand-me-downs

From previous sorrows.

My smiles

Hide my pain

In hopes that someday

I can regain

Some semblance

Of esteem

Or at least a façade

That can redeem me

**From this pit
Of questionable existence
And bring
A new experience to light.**

**And then
He came to me.
Rather than lift me
To his face
He knelt before me
And he saw me.
With grace he looked
Deep into my eyes
As he washed my feet.
Together we rose
My new father and I
With the full knowledge
That I would never languish
Forgotten again.
What a beautiful thing
To be loved as a child.**

In this digital age, there is something I miss very much. I used to write everything by hand, but my handwriting got so bad that even I couldn't read it. Writing can be frustrating. Ask any writer as they work hard to say exactly what they are trying to get across to the reader. Often, when I was writing by hand and I realized the words were just, well, wrong. They were falling short. I would tear the paper off the tablet, wad it up, and throw it away. There was something satisfying about wadding up that paper. It was almost a way of resetting my mind as I sought a different approach. I can't wad up a digital document. I miss that. And yes, I could try to write everything by hand, but it would take me a lot longer and I would still have to type it in. Years ago, when personal computing was still young, they tried to recreate the experience of wadding up paper. If you put a document in the trash, a graphic of a little piece of paper wadded up before moving it to the trash can. I don't remember when that stopped. It still wasn't as satisfying as wadding up a physical sheet of paper. Sometimes we need to be able to wad up and throw away obsolete ideas and rethink our approach to the world.

Today, we are going to talk about fatherhood and try to redefine it. Because the old definitions don't work anymore. As much as I hate that the world has come to this, how we view fatherhood in 2023 is just not how we viewed fatherhood sixty years ago. Most of my generation and older grew up in a world where "baby daddy" and "sperm donar" was not a moniker. We were still looking at invitro fertilization as the future, a possible way to help infertile couples, but there was a fear that it would eventually lead to test tube babies and a family

dynamic that the world was not prepared for. The science behind such a process gave us nightmares. The model of the family that we lived by was where the parents stayed together, even after their children grew up and left the nest. Divorce was still somewhat scandalous. Single moms were shunned. Most men still felt a deep obligation for the children they sired. I don't mean to make it all sound so logistically cold, but, unfortunately, it is true. And while many of us would rather go back to the values we had then, we have to admit to ourselves there were just as many things wrong as there was right, and it is extremely difficult to bring back the good without also bringing back the bad as well. We all wish there was a good filter for that.

There was a time when most of us believed that marriage was an important part of having children. As much as we hate to see the lack of commitment to one another, the world is slowly moving away from that model of parenthood. It is a lot like trying to catch a greased pig. Every time we think we have a hold on it, it wriggles and slips out of our fingers. As parents ourselves, it is difficult when we see this happen. But we also know that we need to love our children unconditionally, perceived warts and all. And we love our grandchildren and great-grandchildren even more. It is hard to let go as parents and find peace in knowing that our children have the right to make their own choices, even if we don't think those choices are wise. The most miserable parents I have ever met are the ones who have chosen to break off communication with their children because they do not approve of their choices. We need to realize that it is not about us. We always knew that someday we were going to have to let them go,

and still at the same time, let our children know that they are loved unconditionally.

In a world where more and more men seem to be comfortable stepping away from their responsibilities when it comes to fatherhood, there are also so many more men willing to step into the role of fatherhood for children of no relation. We see men accepting and choosing the role of fatherhood. And that is truly an impressive thing. A man willing to say, “I may not be the biological father of this child, but this child is mine, none-the-less. I love this child. I take responsibility for this child. I will nurture this child. I will protect this child. I will raise this child. I will teach this child.” Such a man is truly worthy of our admiration.

“But... But... But... preacher. That’s not how God meant it to be,” I hear people thinking. And I respond by saying, that’s exactly how God meant it to be. Child-rearing is not about genetics. We need to understand that our values regarding raising children must transcend social mores and practices. Whether we choose to accept the concept of a baby-daddy, a child born into this world deserves a father, a man willing to step in and provide for that child mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. A man who wants to be a stalwart presence in that child’s life, an example.

And when we say that is not the way God meant it to be, I want you to think back 2000 years ago. God sent a child into this world through an unwed mother. No one looks down on Mary for being an unwed mother, although there were probably people in her day that did. The amazing example of how we should

react, the way God wants us to react, is seen in Joseph as he humbly accepts the role of helping to raise this child, to be a father of this child, even though the child is not of his genes.

“Well, that’s different, preacher. That child was Jesus and God was his father.” Saying that would be us bending our perceptions into believing that it is okay for God to change the rules. But God didn’t change the rules. The child needed an earthly father and God provided one in Joseph. It was intentional. And I choose to believe that those men who step into the role of fatherhood for children they did not sire is also a gift from God. It is the perfect example of God’s love triumphing over the rules and prejudices of people.

I also want to add my praise to for women who chosen to be both mom and dad to their children whose father has stepped away or been taken early. It is not easy for a single mom to raise a child alone. And the same is true for fathers who find themselves in a position that requires them to take on a dual role in raising their kids. Life happens. We adjust. And we realize that in the end, it’s all about the children.

I say all of this to bring out the point that fathers are not appointed. They choose the role. A man must decide to be a father whether the child is his or not. He must walk into the role with his eyes and heart wide open, knowing the sacrifices that will need to be made. I am sad to say, many men are not up to that challenge. In this age of extended families, dysfunctional families, families that may or may not fit into our ideas of what a family should be, the concept of father takes on a whole new meaning. There is also the challenge that a man may be

required to share that parenting role with the child's biological father, a previous stepfather, or maybe an adoptive father. That can make things awkward as parents try to navigate a broken system to ensure the well-being of the child. But being willing to step into that chaos and take on the challenges that result shows a strong desire to do what is right for the children involved and bring them the security that they deserve.

So, I challenge our perceptions of fatherhood. I truly believe that a child is better off knowing that the person engaged in the role of father for them, does it because he wants to do it. The child will feel much safer and loved.

When I left for college so many years ago, my dad was living on the farm that I often talk about in east Texas. He needed help. There's a lot of work running a farm. But he worked with the local social services department and brought a troubled teenaged young man under his wing. The boy had been in and out of juvie and his parents had been abusive. My dad, who had such a loving nature, brought that boy out to the farm, and taught him and taught him responsibility. And he helped that young man find his way into a better and more fruitful life. He became a surrogate father for that young man.

There are plenty of young men and women out there that need fathers. There are plenty of opportunities to make a difference in their lives. And it has nothing to do with biology. It's about morale fortitude and being willing to step into relationships where we will take on that responsibility. While we are helping these young people out, we will also be growing in wisdom, patience, love, and grace just as our Creator intended.

13 Then the people brought their little children to Jesus so that he could put his hands on them and pray for them. When his followers saw this, they told the people to stop bringing their children to Jesus.

14 But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me. Don’t stop them, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to people who are like these children.”

15 After Jesus put his hands on the children, he left there.

Matthew 19:13-15

The disciples saw the children as a bother. They didn’t understand that Jesus did not see the children as a nuisance, but precious in the eyes of God. These children were of no relation to Jesus, and yet he stepped into a fatherly role to protect and nurture them. He put his hands on them and prayed for them. He went on to explain that our relationship with God was the same type of relationship as these children, with our Heavenly Father stepping into a role of protecting and nurturing his children. And his children are us. God does not ignore us, even when we don’t meet the expectations of others around us. Even when others think of us as a nuisance.

We, in turn, are father figures to the children around us. It is our duty to pray for them, encourage them, teach them, help them become the fathers and mothers that will carry on our love for Christ and his church. We cannot shirk our duties to address our responsibilities for the next generation even if we have no biological connection to the children that we nurture.

I remember that when I was a young man, there were so many men that stepped up to encourage me and provide me with guidance and wisdom. My dad, as much as I loved and looked up to him, just wasn't around that much. These surrogate fathers made a difference in my life. They helped me focus on the words of Christ and his love for me. Children are like stone pots just waiting to be filled with new wine, the same wine that Christ pours into us, we pour into the children around us..

The greatest gift we can give a child is the gift of time. I know that we are busy trying to keep food on the table and a roof overhead. But it takes so much more than that to be a father. Any time spent with a child to help them grow is time well spent and will be rewarded down the line. Time with dad is so much more important than any present we could offer. Our children need our time more than they need anything else.

For those who have become estranged from our children for any reason, now is the time to make things right. It's not about who is right or who is wrong. It's about healing that relationship. It's about letting them know that no matter what the problem is, it is not insurmountable. Our God can heal any rift.

23 So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you,

24 leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God.

That is true for our children as well. Remember when the prodigal son returns home?

“He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms round his son, and kissed him.

21 ‘Father,’ the son said, ‘I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.’

22 But the father called his servants. ‘Hurry!’ he said. ‘Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet.

23 Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast!

24 For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.’

Luke 15:20-24

This is what we do as fathers. The relationship with our children is far more important than our pride. Christ humbled himself on the cross and we should do no less to regain our relationships with our children. So, I implore you to make things right with your children.

Today is the day that we celebrate fatherhood, but I want you to carry it forward this entire week and celebrate the father figures in your life. Those of us that are older may no longer have our fathers or grandfathers with us, but that

doesn't mean that we can't set aside some time this week to remember the many fathers that chose to step into our lives and give of themselves to help us become who we are today. Celebrate their kindness and courage. And part of that celebration is pouring ourselves into the children around us.

May we who are fathers ourselves, continue to look to God for guidance in our lives so that, like Jesus, we can be examples to our children and children's children. Are we carrying our children?

31 and in the wilderness. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place."

God bless you all

AMEN

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