

TO THE DISCOURAGED FATHER ON FATHER'S DAY

Becoming a new father is a joyful time of celebration. But it can also be very sobering and a bit intimidating as we realize we are now responsible for the welfare of a helpless human being. In many ways, their success in life will depend on how I perform as a father. Many of us take on this challenge with lofty ideals and expectations. We read books, listen to sermons on parenting, and seek advice from fathers we admire. "If I could just put together the right formula," we think, "then I will be guaranteed the right results."

Decades pass, and while all homes experience disappointments, some fathers will have lived out their original ideals better than others. You may look back with regrets and wish you could do some things over. Father's Day can be discouraging because it serves as a reminder of the needs in your family and the responsibility a father bears for those needs. If this is you, you are not alone. How should we process our failures as Christian fathers?

First, humble yourself, recognize the areas you have failed in, and accept responsibility for them. This may include misplaced priorities, uncontrolled anger, compromised integrity, unkept promises, etc. Ask God to help you in this self-examination, and ask your family about any experiences that may stand out to them. If there are areas you have not resolved, be willing to apologize and ask forgiveness without minimizing your actions. If you have hurt someone, acknowledging the pain you have caused them will help them process and deal with it correctly. *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed* (Jas 5:16). Confessing your faults and praying for each other can bring healing to you and those you have offended.

If you have asked for and received forgiveness, leave it there. Learn from your mistakes and be willing to accept forgiveness—it is not helpful to continue to beat yourself up over them. Preoccupation with past failures will keep you from growth today.

Failure often comes out of character flaws, and once they are identified, necessary corrections must be made. As Christian men, we are all growing, seeking to put off the old man and be transformed into the character of Christ. This process will continue until the end of life, and it is never too late to make changes and start doing the right thing. *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ* (Php 1:6).

Keep your failures in a proper perspective. While you must not minimize your failures, neither should you exaggerate them, as if no other factors influence the outcome. Some circumstances are beyond your control, and you cannot control the choices of others. God's grace is available equally to those who have done wrong and those who have been wronged. Each person must choose to avail themselves of that grace. Accept God's grace and be an instrument of that grace to others.

As a father, you enjoy fixing things when they go wrong. However, some family situations are beyond your control, and trying to impose your will only worsens the matter. When

you fail to realize this, you will become anxious and lose your peace. Worry signals a lack of trust in God. In these circumstances, exercise faith in God's promises and providence, reaching for an attitude of hopeful surrender—accepting things as they are, while trusting that God can bring change. *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you* (1 Pe 5:6-7).

This does not mean you disengage from the family. Regardless of the difficulty or strained relationships, be sure the family sees your commitment to them. This may require longsuffering, showing patience while you try to be a faithful example and wait on God. If you have a son or daughter making disappointing decisions, be honest with them, but communicate your love and look for opportunities to point out the positives you see. *Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not* (Gal 6:9).

On this Father's Day, if you find yourself dealing with feelings of regret or failure, you are not alone. You cannot undo the past, but as you remain under the lordship of Jesus Christ and walk in the Spirit, God is moving you towards a better future. None of us will be an example of perfection, but we can be an example of humility, growth, longsuffering, commitment, and steadfast faith. The greatest failure would be to give up. So take courage, fathers, and press forward in faith.

~Steve Long