

## I. Quotes

- A. “Being a great father is like shaving. No matter how good of job you do today, you have to do it again tomorrow.” Reed Markham
- B. “When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened.” Winston Churchill
- C. Motherhood comes naturally, but Fatherhood has to be learned. Margaret Mead
- D. When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant that I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years.” Mark Twain

## II. Set Up

- A. Happy Father's Day – or “Happy Cologne, Necktie and BBQ Accessories Day.” A special shout out to all the new Dads out there. We used to say, “you are the ones who now carry pictures of your new baby in your billfold, right next to where your money used to be.” But now pictures are all on smart phones, so we'll just say, “You know who you are, so ‘Welcome to the Club.’”
- B. As with Mother's Day a few weeks back – we realize that there are more ways for this to be a hard day than a fun day: some of you recently lost your father; some of you do not or did not have a great relationship with your father; some of you fathers do not have a great relationship with your children; some of you fathers are not very convinced that you are a good father. There are lots of ways to be sideways here. One of the great benefits of coming together to worship our Heavenly Father is to be reminded of the unconditional aspect of His love and of the great promises He has made to one day set all things right. There is only one perfect Dad – you are not it. But his love for imperfect Dads and imperfect children is complete, and it changes everything.
- C. Today we finish up the *Greater Than* series – which has emerged out of our study of Luke 11 & 12. So far we've noted that Jesus is greater than *evil, death, religion, fear* and *sin*. Today we note that Jesus is greater than the challenges that plague Dads. To be more specific – he is greater than anxiety – which builds on a sermon a few weeks back – also out of Luke 12, on fear. What do you fear? What keeps you up at night? What makes your heart race? Dads are often weighted down with various anxieties. Well, if you are a Dad, help is on the way. And if you are not a Dad, help is still on the way, because what Jesus has to say at the end of Luke 12 applies to everyone.
- D. Let me read this passage for us: Luke 12:22-31

1. Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?”
2. “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.
3. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

### III. Intro.

- A. I think we all intuitively know that Father’s Day is a bit of an afterthought. It always was – it became a national holiday later than Mother’s Day – and it’s just not as big of deal.
  1. Less money is spent on gifts. Fewer people go out for a nice meal. Phone traffic on Mother’s Day dwarfs phone traffic on Father’s Day. Everyone calls Mom. Not everyone calls Dad. And back when such a thing still happened, most of the Father’s Day calls were made collect.
  2. And then there is this: I was talking with a friend, whose daughter had a science project that required her to buy a couple dozen baby chicks and chart their growth over the first few weeks of their life. So he built a temporary chicken coop, got everything set up, developed a plan for what to do with the 24 chicks after two weeks, etc. etc. And then he goes to buy them. He later called me to say:
    - a) “Any idea how much a day-old chick costs?” I had none. He said, “Three dollars.”
    - b) I said, “OK, I guess that sounds about right.” At which point he said, “Right. \$3 sounds about right. But that’s only the price for females. For hens. Boy chicks are only fifty cents. Fifty cents! They might as well give them away for free. Not even boy chicks get any respect.”

3. Well, I hope you Dads are feeling better than that. We think you’re worth more than fifty cents! Maybe not a whole \$3. But at least \$2.50. And we are aware that there are days when someone of you doubt anyone would pay fifty cents for you.

IV. The books and files you see stacked here are just part of what I have in my library on the topic, “How to be a better dad.” There is a lot out there.

A. Most of these books were written by Christians and represent efforts to unpack the biblical directives for Dads – often by pointing out all of the things the Dads reported on in the Bible did wrong. This Book is full of ‘bad dads:’ Noah, Jacob, Samuel, David – these guys were spectacularly bad Dads. CPS would have had them on speed dial.

B. Many of the articles also share a biblical perspective on fatherhood, but as I was leafing through one of the three folders I have jammed with articles a few weeks ago, I was struck by how many were from *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Chicago Tribune* or *New York Times*. I even have an article in here from *The Harvard Business Review* about being a Dad. It’s a big deal. The topic gets a lot of ink.

C. As you may know if you’ve read any of these kinds of books, they tend to start by announcing that the sky is falling as it relates to the family. And the statistic they all tend to start with notes that back in 1970, about 90 percent of children were born into a two parent families. But then the number started falling down. In the ‘90s it was down into the mid-sixties. Today it’s at 59%, and in some urban settings it’s down to 20 percent.<sup>1</sup>

D. These books then list the ways Dads are MIA – either physically not around or emotionally checked out – and the devastating effect this has on kids, especially boys.<sup>2</sup>

E. Some keep going to chronicle all of the ways men make a mess of more than just their families. I used to open the fall of Men’s Fraternity with some variation of these numbers:

1. Ninety percent of the major crimes in the US are committed by men.
2. One hundred percent of all the rapes are from men.
3. Ninety-five percent of all the burglaries are from men.

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<sup>1</sup> David Hirsch, “The Fatherhood Doctrine,” *The Chicago Tribune*, June 16, 2013, p. 20. Note: It is generally believed – and documented – that the absence of a father creates dynamics that make it much more challenging for children to thrive and far more likely that they will grow up in poverty or be subject to abuse.

<sup>2</sup> In the cover story of a *Newsweek* article, entitled, “The Trouble with Boys,” Peg Trye writes: One of the most reliable predictors of whether a boy will succeed or fail in high school rests on a single question: does he have a man in his life to look up to? Too often, the answer is no. High rates of divorce and single motherhood have created a generation of fatherless boys. In every kind of neighborhood, rich or poor, an increasing number of boys – now a startling 40 percent – are being raised without their biological dads.

4. Ninety-one percent of all the offenses against families or children come from men.
  5. Ninety-four percent of all drunken drivers are men.
- F. The horrific events of this past week – the shooting of 9 people at a Bible study down in South Carolina at a historic African American church – which is unthinkable and tragic in so many ways, was not surprising in one thing: it was a guy who pulled the trigger. Let’s set all the racial dynamics aside for a moment. We know racism was the ugly motivator. But when we woke up to hear that 9 African Americans were shot at a prayer meeting, whether we assumed that the killer was white or black, virtually all of us assumed that the shooter was male. And he was.
- G. Part of what these books point out is that men cause more than fifty percent of the problems we face.
- H. There are other themes in these files.
- I. I have what I call “specialty articles:” Advice for Dads with daughters; advice for Dads with step-sons or what to do as a grand-dad or how to be a Dad to your adult son or for your new son-in-law.
- J. Because I’ve been filing articles away for thirty years, I can sort things by trends. I have what I call the “mock Spock” section – belittling Dr. Benjamin Spock’s counsel. There is also a whole series of “What happened to all of the good TV Dads?” articles, lamenting that we traded in Atticus Finch and Ward Cleaver, and then it lifts up the current model. It used to be a Doofus Dad - Homer Simpson and Al Bundy.<sup>3</sup> I’ve not been paying attention lately, but my sense is that things have deteriorated from there.
- K. I have other things in my files: prayers I prayed for my boys; goals they set on their birthdays; notes from Father’s Day sermons I heard or preached.
- L. I have all kinds of things in here. What I didn’t find in any of the books or articles anything about today’s topic: the anxiety that comes with being a father. And that sort of shocks me. Because I’m in conversations anxious Dads all the time. Men who feel overwhelmed by the pressures of life: a job that demands more and more even as it returns less and less, coupled with a family that needs more and more time and attention. Modern dads are expected to keep climbing at work and be at all the ball games and parent-teacher conferences and serve as a moral compass for their family and make it look easy.

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<sup>3</sup> In “The Doofus Dad,” John Tierney writes: One evening, after watching Homer Simpson wreck the family car at a monster-truck rally and plunge on a skateboard into Springfield Gorge, my 6-year-old son asked me, “Why are dads on TV so dumb? Having grown up with the omniscient fathers on “Leave it to Beaver” and “My Three Sons,” I wanted to give a bemused yet authoritative answer, chuckling wisely as I explained the ways of the world. But this question left me feeling more like Homer Simpson. ... There have always been some bumbling fathers like Dagwood Bumstead and Fred Flintstone, but now they’re the norm. ... Ward Cleaver has been replaced by a stock character known in the trade as Doofus Dad. (John Tierney, “The Doofus Dad,” *The New York Times*, June 18, 2005, p. A29.)

- M. I suppose I could write the article about Dads and anxiety. It almost writes itself:
1. It starts with the nearly universal moment that happens on the way home from the hospital – with nine pounds of baby and 900 pounds of baby gear, and a Dad thinking, “I’m not ready for this. I have no idea what I’m doing. How did I end up with a baby? I can’t be a dad. I don’t know anything about this. I’m a fraud.”
  2. And that anxiety grows as they think: what if I lose my job? What if I make a really stupid decision or the company folds? What then? After graduating from Trinity I took a position as a college pastor on the West Coast. It was a great eight years. Towards the end of that time I sensed God leading me to move on. So – much to my father’s horror – in January of ’92 I informed the church that I would be leaving at the end of the summer. I was quite confident I’d have another job by then. I did not. What I did have was a family: a wife, two kids and a mortgage. We went into lock-down mode conserving money. I remember thinking, “What kind of colossal loser am I to put my family at risk like this?”
- N. A few weeks back in a message about fear I talked about a guy who came into see me because he wasn’t sleeping through the night – grinding his teeth when he did manage to doze off. I did not talk about the guys I know who wake up many mornings at 2 AM to throw up from anxiety. Of course – being a guy means you can joke about these things but not really own them. So there is a lot of silent anxiety out there.
- V. Now, the anxiety I’m talking about is a feeling common to many people in all stages of life – not just Dads.
- A. In fact, it is especially common among single parents, for whom it is multiplied at least four or five fold. I understand that, and single Moms and Dads, you have my respect and prayers. My focus today is specifically on Dad’s because:
1. Well, it’s Father’s Day.
  2. And Dads have an outsized influence on their family – it is very hard (not impossible, but very hard) for a family to do better than Dad is doing. Dads have an influence that is not earned – and often is very undeserved – but they have it. There are statistics that show that for every 100 high school kids that starts attending church, about 7 families will follow. And for every 100 Moms that starts attending church, about 30 families will follow, but for every 100 Dads that start attending church, 97 families will follow. Dads have a God-given outsized influence on families.

B. So for various reasons I am focused on Dads today. In light of all that, let me invite you to turn to our passage.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem – which ultimately means, he’s on the road to the cross. He is heading to his death. He’s been teaching and preaching for close to three years now. He’s developed quite a name for himself. The crowds are large. And in this series we’ve been noting how he is better than – bigger than, stronger than, more amazing than – the things that hold us back: evil, death, religion and fear. Today we see that He is greater than stress and anxiety.

VI. I am reading now - Luke 12:22f:

A. *Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.*

1. Some translations say, “Fear Not.” I suppose there is some daylight between the definitions of *fear* and *worry*, but not much. By the way, in the set up you were asked, “What do you fear?” It’s important to think this through because:

a) Our fears are a great indicator of our idols, which are almost always good things – like job security or health – that we rightly value but unfortunately end up valuing too much. They are promoted beyond their station.

b) Identifying our fears also helps because it allows us to look backwards and see that we survived and perhaps to laugh. “I was worried about that?” No doubt you’ve outgrown many of your earlier fears: monsters under the bed; not being able to get your locker open at school, not passing your driver’s exam. When I was young, before I entered the phase where I hated girls and I would leave the room if there was any kissing on TV. Before that happened, I watched kissing intently because I couldn’t figure out how you knew which was to turn your head so your nose wasn’t in the way when you kissed. It was a big concern. Who was going to teach me that? Nobody talked about it. Everyone just seemed to know. I didn’t know.

2. So we need to identify our fears so we can understand what our idols are – and confess them. And also so we can look back and either see how small-minded we can be or see how God has protected us from our fears or walked us through them.

3. We give a lot of power to our fears. They control us. We need to rise above that.

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<sup>4</sup> Some measure of concern is called for. I’ve had my nose in Proverbs a bunch in preparation for the fall series – and there is lots there about planning and saving and not considering the cost of a project before you jump into it. So, let’s be clear, what Jesus is saying here cannot be accurately translated *hakuna matata* – the Swahili phrase made popular in the Lion King – which translates, “Have no worries. Ignore your troubles.

B. V23: *For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens:*

1. “Ravens” is a nice name for crows – which are big, loud, ugly scavengers. They are the birds that root through the trash and eat the road kill. And so – not too surprisingly – in Old Testament law they are listed as unclean. You were defiled if you touched a crow.<sup>5</sup>

2. There is a crow that has a nest on the top of a telephone pole that stands along a bike path that I run down. And starting a few years ago this crow would dive bomb me every time I’d run by. I used to think it was pretty comical and I just learned to wave my arm over my head as I went by. Since the stroke – now that my pace is slower – it feels like the bird is picking on me. And I’m not so good humored about it. We’ve had words. I can see the shadow of the bird and I wait until it’s swooping down and then turn, “You want a piece of me. You think you can take me. Bring it on. Stop flying away.”

3. By the way, I feel free to make fun of crows because none of you have any pet crows at home. When I say anything about cats my email box fills up. I can mock crows with abandon because no one has a pet crow flying around their house. “That’s Squawky, don’t mind him. He just flies around making a mess and rifling through the trash and pecking at any food we happen to leave out.”

4. Crows are loud, ugly, unclean pests. Jesus lists them here to say: “God takes care of the loud, dirty birds *that do not sow or reap, that have no storeroom or barn*. He even provides for them. And you are far more valuable than a crow. Relax!

C. V25: *Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?<sup>6</sup> Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?*

1. Worry doesn’t do us any good. It doesn’t gain us anything.

2. By the way, please note that Jesus did not say, “Do not work.” He said, “Do not worry.” I’ve met some people who act as if not working and simply depending on God to provide is an act of great faith.

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<sup>5</sup> Lev. 11:13-20; Deut. 14:14; Job 39:13-14

<sup>6</sup> The Greek word used here can be translated as “hour” or “height” – and it may be that the double value is intended here. In other words, this passage could be translated, “who, by worrying, can add an hour to their life or a foot to their stature?”

a) For almost twenty years I’ve been on the board for a mission organization, now called ScholarLeaders International. Christ Church was supporting it since before I’ve been on staff. One of the students we helped support was an Ethiopian who was trying to figure out how to help The Ethiopian Orthodox Church get out of a particular mess they have created. They recognize 300 saints, each with a different day and they have long taught that you are not supposed to work on a saint day. There are 300 of them. This young man argued that part of the reason the country is so poor is because the faithful only work 60 days a year. Many farmers do not do enough work in the fields to actually have any crop to harvest. It is their misguided religious devotion that is doing them in.

b) Paul was on this problem long ago. In 1 Thess he spoke about Christ’s return. A lot of people decided to stop working and just wait. In 2 Thess 3 he said, “If you do not work you do not eat.” We are called to work. Invited to. Work is a good thing. Part of the plan. It is not part of the curse. Work is harder because of sin, but it’s a good thing. It’s a privilege.”

3. The call is not to not work, it is to not worry. “Do not be anxious.”

D. Then – V27 – we get another example of how God provides for lesser things so we can be confident that he will attend to our needs. “*Consider how the wild flowers grow. Some translations say “Lillies. We thought, for Father’s Day we could give all of the men a lilly. They’d like that. Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire,<sup>7</sup> how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.*

1. The big point here is: we can trust God to do what is best. This is not a promise that everything will be easy – that we will not face hardships. But we can face them in faith. We are not alone.

2. Our job is to focus on God. To care about His big plan. Heaven – where He is and where everything will work. And to see him first and then the problem. Not the other way around. If we gaze at God and right-size Him, and are reminded of who He is, then problems look small. His glory sort of blocks them out. But if we look at the problem first, then it sort of blocks out God.

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<sup>7</sup> Grass (and flowers) are often used as an example of something that is of little value yet God provides for. See Job 8:12; Isaiah 40:6-8.

E. V32-3: *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor.”*

1. This is one of the places where you get New Testament counsel on how much to give. I’ve referenced this before. If you do not like the ten percent number – which I’ve argued is the baseline and which is freeing – we find directives like this that suggest giving even more.

2. My sense is that the thrust here is not giving for the poor’s benefit. We can certainly find other places where that point is made. My sense is that here we are being told to give for our own benefit – both now (as we learn to trust) and in heaven (as we are rewarded).

F. V 33: *Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.*

1. We are not fighting to pry blessings out of his hand. He is pleased to bless us. It is his desire to do so.

G. *Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.*

1. Again, the benefits are for here but also for eternity.

H. V34: *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

1. Some of you think you have a money problem. You actually have a heart problem.

VII. OK, a few things to think about on this Father’s Day.

A. I did some more study on fears – and learned some things. There are lots of fears out there. For instance:

1. Coulrophobia is the fear of clowns – which probably spiked after that Stephen King novel

2. Arachbutyrophobia: clinical term for being scared that you’re going to get too much peanut butter stuck to the roof of your mouth and not be able to breath.

3. Germanophobia: Fear of Germans – which would be a real bummer if you were German.

B. If you are a worrier – and can be a little creative – you will not run out of things to worry about. And your fear will fall into one of three camps: not getting what we want; getting what we want and losing it; or getting what we do not want.

1. We fear not getting what we want: we want a certain job or we want to get married or we want to have kids and we fear it is not going to happen.

2. We fear getting what we want – money – and then losing it all

3. We fear getting what we do not want: cancer

- C. As I said, I did some reading about fear and there is lots to learn. Last time:
1. I made a bigger deal out of the fact that we should fear – God's punishment for our sin – but is taken care of.
  2. But if we rightly fear God then a lot of other fears go away.

VIII. In the sermon a few weeks back I focused more on fear. Here I want to end by focusing more on God, specifically, on God as our Father and what that should mean to our sense of well-being. Let me wrap things up with a story.

- A. Years ago, I'm guessing that our youngest was three or four, I was reading *The Lord of the Rings* to his older two brothers and he was listening in. It was a multi-month endeavor that was part of our bed-time routine.
- B. Well, one particular night – middle of the night – I hear him crying out. I get up and go into his room to see what's wrong and he says, "I'm hot. I can't sleep." So I strip a blanket off of him and say "there, now you'll be fine. Just close your eyes."
- C. A minute later, another call. I'm feeling a bit less charitable this time. He says he's still hot. I feel his forehead, no fever, I tell him he's fine. "Close your eyes it will be morning before you know it."
- D. I go back into our room. Sheri is awake and asks what's going on. I tell her "Jason is hot but it's under control." She says, "He's hot or he's Hot?"
- E. I look at her like, it's 2AM and you are not making any sense. She says, "I'm pretty sure he's saying he's Hot" which means he's scared. You've terrified the poor child reading that book about orcs and trolls and caves. He doesn't want to admit to being scared so he says he's hot."
1. I think she might have also said something about how I should be shot for terrifying her poor child, but I'll leave that out.
  2. And for the record, this was not the first time I missed the secret language. When he was even younger there was a day when I was trying to get him to eat and he wouldn't and he kept saying, "Taste's like BBQ." It wasn't. It was green beans of something. But I'm like, "Bonus – it tastes like BBQ. All the more reason you should eat it." Sheri had to inform me then that *BBQ* was his word for burnt. I was like, "Oh. And then, as I processed the fact that I was the only one who ever cooked on the grill, I was like, "Wait!" It was a clear indictment on my cooking.
- F. Anyway, it's not more than another minute before we hear a little yelp from his room and so I go in and ask, "Still hot, buddy?" He says he is, so I say, "How about if I sleep on the floor next to you. Will that help you cool down?" And he said it would. And it did.
- G. A few closing thoughts here – besides, don't read *Lord of the Rings* to any child under the age of 10.

1. First, fathers, if you still have kids whose problems you can fix by sleeping next to them, don't miss that chance. Those memories are better than any tie you will ever get on Father's Day. The period in which Dads get to be the strong hero is pretty short. And when they get older their problems get much more complicated and you will not be quite as able to make things right. I miss those days.
  2. Secondly, the statement that is being made here by God the Father, is just like that. It's not, "Do not be afraid! Man up. Stop being weak. Suck it up. Push ahead." It's "I'm here. I got this. Relax. Go to sleep."
  3. V32 reads: *Do not be afraid, little flock...* Little flock is a term of endearment. It's not "suck it up and stop whining." It's "How about if I sleep next to you. Will that help you not be so hot? Close your eyes. Relax. I'm going to be right here and I'll make sure no monsters get you."
- H. A right view of God changes everything. The amazing truth is, the All-powerful Creator of the galaxies invites you to call him *Dad, Abba Father*. It's a term of endearment and care. He is saying, "I got this. Go to sleep."
- IX. I started this sermon noting that I have lots of books on being a Dad. I also have lots of books on anxiety. And they are filled with advice. Pretty predictable stuff:
- A. Work out
  - B. Eat less salt
  - C. Pace yourself, use bio feedback, don't sweat the little things.
  - D. But the books I have generally miss the best advice out there: cry out to your Heavenly father, who understands that you are hot and that you need to know that He is lying next to you so you can go back to sleep.