

I love Father's Day. All those beautiful images of caring dads, sitting back and reflecting on what a great job we've done raising our kids. What's not to like?

However, by now you should know how my mind works...yes, there's always a however. As I was preparing this message, the latest report on Domestic Violence was released. As you suspect, it wasn't good news. Did you know, over a million children in Australia will have either no or only occasional contact with their father this year?

What's gone wrong with the dads of Australia? How did we get here?

I realise every generation – looks down at those following, with despair – why can't they be like us? What short memories we have! Let me share with you a couple of stories when my children were growing up.

My daughter went to an all-girl's school. When she was in year six I went with her to a Father/daughter camp. We had a really fun time all weekend. But I guess I've been to too many Christian camps. I kept waiting for the deep/meaningful bits – the challenging talk, or those serious discussions, helping fathers understand their near teenage daughters and vice versa. When I asked the organiser 'what was the purpose of the weekend?' she said "we just wanted the girls to have fun".

It made me wonder: what message is that sending to our kids?

Another story – My son played U12 soccer. His team wasn't very good. I think they only won a couple of games. But that was OK with me – they're still learning, its good exercise, nice to see him socialising with boys he doesn't go to school with. When it came to the end of season BBQ I was expecting the usual awards – best and fairest, most improved, best ball boy etc. So I was quite surprised when every boy received a trophy, plus a tracksuit embroidered with the team name, year and competition - which made them look like they had won! When I said to the coach that this seemed a bit over the top, he replied "we don't want them to be discouraged."

It made me wonder: what message is that sending to our kids?

If our goal was to just give our children a good time – or not deflate their ego's, no wonder our grown-up children are now floundering. We've supplied lots of distractions – possessions, activities, fun times - but never given them the foundations on which to base their lives.

I realise at least half of us here are not fathers. So, it's not exactly relevant to rant/rave about the role and responsibility of fathers. Instead, I'm going to look at two people whose message is pertinent to every person here - as we think about the legacy we leave others.

Deuteronomy is one of the great teaching books of the Old Testament. Since Moses led Israel out of Egypt – with all those miracles; the ten plagues, opening of the Red Sea etc. etc. - that whole generation died, because of their refusal to enter the promised land the first time around. If you're not familiar with the story, look up Numbers 13,14 – and the 12 spies Moses sent to check out the land in advance. They all returned with glowing reports but 10 claimed the

Father's Day. Deuteronomy 11: 18 – 28 Philippians 2: 5 – 11

inhabitants were too strong for them, even if God was with them. God then promised none of that generation will enter the promised land – except for the other two spies, Caleb and Joshua.

And so, after 40 years in the wilderness, on the verge of entering the promised land, Moses addresses their children. Like all inspirational speakers, he wants to set the tone before he gets to the punch line. Listen to how he sets it up:

**Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds.**

**Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.**

**Teach them to your children – talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get .**

**Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deuteronomy 11:18 -20).**

This is going to be big!

So, what is the message to pass on to the next generation?

**V 22 Love the Lord your God, walk in obedience to him and hold fast to him.**

That's it. No just be yourself and have fun. No, well you didn't win, but we will give you a trophy anyway. Just good old-fashioned obedience. On the doorstep of entering the promised land, Moses gives them a stark choice:

**v 27 I am setting before you a blessing and a curse.**

If you do things God's way – the result is His blessing. If you turn away and follow other gods – which in our society might mean doing your own thing, relying on your own wisdom and understanding - then be prepared for the consequences.

Moses is doing what every responsible parent should do - passing on the values he has learned to the next generation - which a few chapters earlier, included the ten commandments plus a bunch of other important principles – such as take care of the poor and don't rip off your employees.

Passing on our values to the next generation...

Do you realise Christianity – is just one generation from oblivion?

If this generation doesn't pass on our beliefs – including our confidence in the Bible as the inspired word of God - Christianity could simply fade away in one generation.

But then – the same applies to every aspect of humanity.

If we don't pass on knowledge to the next generation – mankind would have to continually start again. The same applies to technology, medicine. It applies even to life itself – especially as Australia's birth rate has now fallen below replacement levels.

Humanity is always just one generation from oblivion.

Moses' message to the next generation is; we're either God's people in God's land under God's rule or it's all-hands-on-deck, as we struggle with those disturbing stories in the news each day.

I don't think Australia has ever been an overtly Christian nation. That doesn't mean we never had Christian values. Even if most people weren't Christians, they knew what the Bible taught. When many of us were growing up, it wasn't unusual to go to church. In those days, Sunday schools were overflowing, school scripture was uncontroversial, and Youth group was ... just what you did on the weekend.

But then my generation, the baby boomers, rejected authority.

Which also meant rejecting God who is the ultimate authority.

Once we cut God out of the equation – within a short time Christian morality – becomes a meaningless bunch of rules – and who wants to obey rules?

In a politically correct society – where there is no absolute right or wrong –whatever works for me is ok. Is it little wonder we struggle to understand gender fluidity?

Father's Day is a good opportunity to remind us – we have an obligation as adults – not just fathers – but all of us, as responsible adults – to pass on Christian values to the next generation, or the world will descend even further into moral uncertainty.

The other lesson Father's Day can teach us –we are not only adults – but also children. Many of us may not be fathers but everyone has had parents. Some may look on our parents with affection/gratitude – some not so fondly. That's the problem with parents – none are perfect – unlike us! (*joke*)

When Jesus first told his disciples - call God "**Father**" – it was a revolutionary idea. In the Jewish faith, God's name was so holy – you would never say it aloud. When they came to "God" in the Old Testament - which is all they had – it was never spoken. Some manuscripts even went so far as to leave a space – because the name of God was considered too holy to use.

Jesus showed us, God is not some abstract concept or remote theory. Because of what he achieved for us on the cross, we can now call this God '**Abba father**' - our father – or daddy if you want the proper translation. We have the great privilege of having an intimate, personal relationship with the living God. But, intimacy comes with responsibilities.

This is where our second reading fits in. In Philippians 2: 3-7, Jesus was fully God – the writer has no qualms there – but, at the same time the human Jesus lived by the directive Moses had given to Israel, so many years before. Jesus **loved the Lord his God, walked in obedience to Him and held fast to Him.**

God cares how we live. Contrary to popular belief, God is not some sort of cosmic kill joy looking down at us and asking "who is having a good time? Well, cut it out!"

We all need standards, guidelines, rules to live by. If you have any doubt, pay attention the next time you see a young family down the street. **Hold my hand, be careful of cars, don't hit your little brother, watch your language!**

Our parents were fallible, they didn't always do the right thing. But, we all need rules. If God really is the wise and powerful creator, we believe him to be, then surely he knows what is best for us. If we are His children, it is our responsibility to seek His will. Can you imagine how different our society would be if we all became other-person centred rather than the 'me first' mentality that seems to be taking over?

There is my Father's Day challenge. Christians are responsible to pass on Christianity to the next generation, and we are all God's children. But, with that privilege comes responsibility. The way we live, the decisions we make are important to God... and others will notice when we fail.

Although I said I was going to talk to everyone here today, hey, on my one day of the year, you can cut me a bit of slack!

Jesus showed us what being a real man is all about. Real manhood involves courage, integrity, character ... but it is more than any of those. A real man is one who is in friendship with God. We can't have the rest without getting the foundation right. In everything he did, Jesus showed he was God's man, consciously making an ongoing friendship with God his top priority.

It's a bit like a karaoke night and it's our turn to sing. We clamber out and grab the mike and stand there, in the midst of the wreckage of our lives - the failed relationships, the problems with temptation, the thousand little lies which slowly chipped away at our integrity. As we stand, in the midst of all that wreckage - lonely even though we have plenty of mates - we think to ourselves **"there must be more to life than this"**. But as we grab the mike, we belt out our favourite song **"I did it my way"**. And the irony is acute, as we think of all the garbage around us. But we still sing "I did it my way". And as we sing, those in the restaurant look up and then all join in that mournful chorus - because they realise, even though their lives may be in exactly the same state as ours, that is all they know.

Jesus sang, "I did it God's way".