



June 2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

Mother's Day has just gone by and Father's Day is almost here. I wish all fathers a happy Father's Day. For Father's Day, I am going to share with you my conviction about being a father, about the joys and sorrows of fatherhood. I would also like to share with you my journey of being a dad.

Being a father is no small feat, especially in the 21st century. The traditional authoritative figure of a strict father is long gone. The generation gap between today's children and their parents is wider than ever. For parents who immigrated from overseas, there is the added complication of cultural differences. Children in NA become self-centered and like to challenge authority, such behavior contradicts with what their parents were raised. However, we have to accept the unacceptable. Otherwise, it would cause an irreparable rift in intergenerational family relationships as seen in many North American Chinese families. Perhaps we have to learn to let go of cherished ideas, step down from a father's pedestal, and treat children as friends on an equal basis. Of course, this is easier said than done. Even if the parents want to enter the child's world, difficulties abound. It is no easy task.

Fatherhood is not easy. Since a patriarchal style of parenting does not work and corporal punishment is not allowed in North American society, what can a father do nowadays except losing his temper? On other hand, the most common phenomenon of parent-child relationships today is that most children have long been spoiled rotten! Most families are small in size nowadays, as parents value quality over quantity. As the child becomes the sole recipient of an abundance of love and affection, obedient children are hard to find but obedient parents and grandparents are seen everywhere. How could a child not turn into a little despot when spoiled by six adults in the family? Children who live in abundance do not really know how fortunate they are. A child who has never faced hardship does not know how to cherish life. Don't you agree?

Proverbs 22:6 says, "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." Living in the present age, how should a father raise his children so that they fear the Lord all the days of their lives? The only effective way is to let the children see how their parents actually fear the Lord in the way they live. A child's attitude towards faith is shaped by his parents' examples. Proverbs 14:26 says, "Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge." When a father fears the Lord and looks to Him for security, his children will follow suit and establish a close relationship with God. Otherwise, if parents simply bring their children to church and do not actually live out their faith, children can only acquire empty Biblical knowledge that has nothing to do with real life. Thus, teaching children about God cannot be undertaken by the church alone. The church and parents must work closely together. During the process of establishing their values and beliefs, children not only learn by listening but also by observing. "Children take in everything they see." They learn from seeing what their parents do,

from observing how parents make their choices. Parental influence on children cannot be changed by Sunday school at church.

In addition, I have a little reminder for career-minded fathers: do not sacrifice your parent-child time for the sake of your busy job. The opportunity to influence your beloved children to love God is not in the future but today. You should know that if you wait till you have free time, your children will not have time for you anymore. Let me tell you about a black hole in my life.

That year, I was admitted into seminary. For me, it was a dream come true after an arduous journey. In Vietnam, I was a pastor, but after we were accepted by the United States as refugees and resettled in this unfamiliar country, I realized that I could not continue to serve in a church due to lack of NA acceptable academic credentials. I had to retake college study while working. Finally, after several years, I re-applied and was accepted for admission into the Nyack theological seminary. Overjoyed, I pushed all my other responsibilities to the back of my mind. The seminary was about an hour away. In order to let me concentrate on my studies, my wife reluctantly agreed to let me stay in the seminary during the week and return home during weekends. I remember my first day at the seminary. I arrived really early and it was dead quiet. With my luggage in hand, I stood in the parking lot and stared at the blue sky. The seminary before me looked like a dream, not sure if it was real or not. I recalled all the hardships of the past years and never expected a day like this----- to study in a seminary again and equip myself for ministry. This opportunity was a gift of God for me to cherish. So, I buried myself in books day and night, determined not to let this hard-earned opportunity slip away. I studied feverishly. I returned home Saturday evenings, worshiped with my family at church on Sundays and hurried back to the seminary on Sunday afternoons. I was lost in those days. And that time was when my daughter went through her most troubling years of teenage rebellion and I totally neglected her. I thought if I could complete my studies soon, then I could spend more time with my wife and daughter as a way of making up to them. It turned out that when I left the seminary, my daughter also left for high school in Germany. Then she went to Boston for college and stayed in Boston after graduation to work. She was like a bird leaving her nest to spread her wings and never came home. I had lost the opportunity to compensate for what I owed my daughter. Today my daughter has her own family. As her father, a deep regret existed deep in my heart. I will never be able to make up for this black hole in my life.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord help you seize the opportunity and guide your children to the way they should go. After you have done your part, you can rest in God's faithfulness. Psalm 127 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat — for He grants sleep to those He loves. Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him."

Serving together with you in the Lord,

Pastor Calvin Tran