



FATHER'S DAY

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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I. Introduction

The idea of Father's Day was conceived in 1909 by Sonora Smart Dodd. Upon listening to a Mother's Day sermon, Dodd thought it would be just as good an idea to establish a day for children to honor their fathers. She herself had been blessed to have an exceptionally good father. Her mother had died giving birth to the sixth child in the family, so her father was left alone with the six children to rear. Thus, Dodd organized the first Father's Day on June 19, 1910 in her hometown of Spokane, Washington. Many years later, in 1924, President Calvin Coolidge publically supported the idea of Father's Day. In 1966, President Lyndon Johnson signed a presidential proclamation for the holiday. Then, finally, in 1972 President Richard Nixon signed the holiday into law.¹

Our selected text, known by the title the Parable of the Prodigal Son, provides a starting point of potential perspectives on Father's Day. The elder in the parable is the father of two sons. As is so often the case with siblings, the two boys grow up to become young men who choose different paths in life. The older brother chooses to remain at home and work his father's land. The younger brother takes his inheritance and goes off to explore the far reaches of the world. He returns home broke and destitute. Any wayward son returning home after irresponsibly wasting his inheritance could be expected to be met by

an angry father, but this father instead celebrated his son's return. By this action of showering the boy with love and acceptance, the father taught his older son an important lesson in forgiveness.

Surely this good man serves as a witness of patience and forgiveness for every father who must contend with a wayward child. Indeed, it may be a quite typical thing that one child or another among siblings will choose to take the hard way up life's mountain. But lessons of patience and forgiveness are not all that can be gleaned from the parable in the light of Father's Day. This particular father might have realized something of what our heavenly Father wishes for today's fathers to know, which is that the hard way up the mountain is not necessarily the worse way up. Sometimes the hard way up the mountain might even be the best way up, if it is understood that every stumble is a potentially profound learning opportunity. It is a learning opportunity, if one pays close enough attention to the cause of the stumbling and then follows the consequential cues onto a better path. Stumbling yields a particular perspective on life that gives balance to the perspective yielded by life's easier pathways and, together, the brother who stayed at home and the brother who left represent two eyes on life that make for complete vision.

II. Prodigal Fathers

In this present age, there seem to be as many prodigal fathers as prodigal sons: "In America today no other community has been harder impacted by the growing trend of father absence than the African American community. Statistics have been quoted that the percentage of father absent homes is as high as 60%."² Speaking to the congregation of the Apostolic Church of God on Chicago's South Side on June 15, 2008, Barak Obama (not yet president) reflected on his own experience of growing up without his father and the difficulties faced by his mother:

I know what it means to have an absent father, although my circumstances weren't as tough as they are for many young people today. Even though my father left us when I was two years old, and I only knew him from the letters he wrote and the stories that my family told, I was luckier than most...

Still, I know the toll that being a single parent took on my mother - how she struggled at times to the pay bills; to give us the things that other kids had; to play all the roles that both parents are supposed to play. And I know the toll it took on me. So I resolved many years ago that it was my obligation to break the cycle - that if I could be anything in life, I would be a good father to my girls; that if I could give them anything, I would give them that rock - that foundation - on which to build their lives. And that would be the greatest gift I could offer.

While we certainly bemoan the fact that our community and our children are suffering due to the absence of a "full presence" of fathers in households, we might yet think of Father's Day as a day of forgiveness. We might think of it as a day reminding us that we must forgive those fathers who, for one reason or another, have fallen short of their responsibility. Father's who awaken to their paternal responsibility and who seek

redemption and return to their fathering responsibility, should be welcomed home, forgiven, and celebrated. To be sure, we need Father's Day to be as much a day of forgiveness as a day of celebration. Indeed, forgiveness is something to be celebrated.

III. Father's Day Projects

(A) Start a Father to Father Mentoring Project

Fatherhood is a meaningful milestone, a bridge that a man crosses not when he simply participates in conceiving a child but when he accepts the responsibility of rearing a child. The reality is, however, the conception and birth of a child often comes unexpectedly and leaves a young man feeling overwhelmed and unprepared. At such times the new father, inexperienced and perhaps frightened or frustrated, might benefit from the encouragement and support of men who have fathering experience and can give the guidance needed.

Therefore, plans could be made through a local church and community organizations working collectively to bring together inexperienced and experienced fathers in a fathers support group. This Father's Day would be a great time to begin!

With such a group established within a church, for instance, one assignment might be for each experienced father to reach out within the church and, subsequently, into the community to find a young man who has fathered a child and who lacks a mature support group, perhaps a young man who has fathered a child outside of marriage. The older fathers in the group could then mentor the younger inexperienced fathers.

Father's Day church service could then serve as an opportunity not simply to hear a special sermon but to hear testimonies coming out of the father's support group, particularly, the testimonies of those inexperienced fathers who have been mentored into successful fathering. It is also hoped that out of such mentoring would come the readiness of young men to unite unwed families in matrimony, so that young children can grow up in a home with a mother and father.

(B) In June Get Your Father Screened for Prostate Cancer

As a part of your Father's Day celebration this year, let certain men in your life know you care by asking them to get a prostate cancer screening. It is recommended that African American men and men with a family history of prostate cancer get checked at age 45 and get educated on the issues surrounding prostate cancer detection and treatment. Being educated about this screening test allows men to be a partner with their healthcare provider in the decision making process.

For men, prostate cancer is the most common form of cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death in men, behind lung cancer deaths. Not only are African American men more likely to be diagnosed with prostate cancer than the general population, but they are also almost three times more likely to die from it.

There are some well-established risk factors associated with prostate cancer:

- Age - chances of developing prostate cancer rapidly increase after age 50;
- Family history - having a relative with prostate cancer increases the risk for developing prostate cancer.

For additional information about prostate cancer contact the National Cancer Institute at <http://www.cancer.gov/> or the American Cancer Society at <http://www.cancer.org>.

(C) Host a Real Men Cook® Activity

A great charity and event that has honored black men for twenty years is Real Men Cook.® According to their website, Real Men Cook was launched in 1990. “It became the largest family celebration in the country. It is presented annually on Father’s Day, and has been for 19 consecutive years. Father’s Day 2009 will be the 20th Anniversary celebration in ten leading cities, but the reach and spirit goes far beyond the city limits and even influences and creates family service and celebration traditions throughout the country, in the Bahamas, on the continent of African, in London and Paris. Today, Real Men Cook is the leading urban Father’s Day experience. It’s a food tasting family celebration featuring men volunteering to cook for and serve the community. Ticket sales proceeds are enjoyed by partnering non-profit organizations in ten cities. Giving up Father’s Day pampering and participating in Real Men Cook is an example of what men are willing to do for their families and communities to make a difference.

Now in its 20th year, Real Men Cook includes average dads and father-figures, leading celebrities and elected officials. Some notable participants include both Eddie and Gerald Levert who hosted Real Men Cook for two years, and Marc Morial, former mayor of New Orleans and current president of the National Urban League, who has cooked, served and hosted Real Men Cook.

Even then Senator Barack Obama, now the President of the United States, is among the thousands of men who have rolled up their sleeves and donned a Real Men Cook bandana, apron or chef’s hat to make a difference and change the way Father’s Day is celebrated for the benefit of others. As a result, over \$1 million in ticket sales proceeds and donations have been generated by Real Men Cook for its nonprofit partners and organizations that serve families and communities.³

This June, why not begin a Real Men Cook event in your church and community? For Father’s day weekend, invite all of the men at your church and from the community in which your church is located who can cook or at least think they can. Have contests for categories of food—best potato salad, best low-calorie desert, best non-alcoholic drink, best green salad, best non-fried chicken dish, best non-fried fish dish, etc. All of the food should be healthy. You can even have cooking events just for fathers and sons or fathers and daughters. All prizes will be contributions to the non-profit charity of each winner’s choice and all of these charities should be organizations that help fathers and their children. Advertise the event well. Ensure that young and old men are involved. Invite

local celebrities and do a good deed for charity. Contact Real Men Can Cook for ideas on how to get started.

IV. Father's Day Songs

Below are a few song selections appropriate for Father's Day. Some of the songs are secular, but they are worth considering. "Just the Two of Us" is by rapper and actor Will Smith. In hip hop prose, this piece explores a father's love for his son amidst the realities of life. "Father Me" by Shekinah Glory Ministry is a worship song in which God is acknowledged as the comforting, loving, heavenly Father. "Let Me Be the Man My Daddy Was" by the soulful Chi-Lites celebrates the value of a good father and a man's desire to be one.

Just the Two of Us

(Now dad this is a very sensitive subject)

From the first time the doctor placed you in my arms
I knew I'd meet death before I'd let you meet harm
Although questions arose in my mind, would I be man enough?
Against wrong, choose right and be standin up
From the hospital that first night
Took a hour just ta get the car seat in right
People drivin all fast, got me kinda upset
Got you home safe, placed you in your bassinette
That night I don't think one wink I slept
As I slipped out my bed, to your crib I crept
Touched your head gently, felt my heart melt
Cause I know I loved you more than life itself
Then to my knees, and I begged the Lord please
Let me be a good daddy, all he needs
Love, knowledge, discipline too
I pledge my life to you

Chorus:

Just the two of us, we can make it if we try
Just the two of us, (Just the two of us)
Just the two of us, building castles in the sky
Just the two of us, you and I

Five years old, bringin comedy
Every time I look at you I think man, a little me
Just like me
Wait and see gonna be tall
Makes me laugh cause you got your dads ears an all
Sometimes I wonder, what you gonna be
A General, a Doctor, maybe a MC
Ha-ha, I wanna kiss you all the time

But I will test that butt when you cut outta line, trudad
Uh-uh-uh why you do dat?
I try to be a tough dad, but you be makin me laugh
Crazy joy, when I see the eyes of my baby boy
I pledge to you, I will always do
Everything I can
Show you how to be a man
Dignity, integrity, honor an
An I don't mind if you lose, long as you came with it
An you can cry, ain't no shame in it
It didn't work out with me an your mom
But yo, push comes to shove
You was conceived in love
So if the world attacks, and you slide off track
Remember one fact, I got your back

Chorus

It's a full-time job to be a good dad
You got so much more stuff than I had
I gotta study just to keep with the changin times
101 Dalmations on your CD-ROM
See me-I'm
Tryin to pretend I know
On my PC where that CD go
But yo, ain't nuthin promised, one day I'll be gone
Feel the strife, but trust life does go wrong
But just in case
It's my place
To impart
One day some girl's gonna break your heart
And ooh ain't no pain like from the opposite sex
Gonna hurt bad, but don't take it out on the next, son
Throughout life people will make you mad
Disrespect you and treat you bad
Let God deal with the things they do
Cause hate in your heart will consume you too
Always tell the truth, say your prayers
Hold doors, pull out chairs, easy on the swears
You're living proof that dreams do come true
I love you and I'm here for you

Chorus to fade

(This is a good song dad, how much am I gettin paid for this?)⁴

Father Me

Father, wrap me in your arms,
Father, wrap me in your arms.
Father, wrap me in your arms
and father me.

Father, wrap me in your arms,
Father, wrap me in your arms.
Father, wrap me in your arms,
Father, wrap me in Your arms.

Father, wrap me in your arms,
and father me.

Chorus:

Father, wrap me in your arms,
Father, wrap me in your arms.
Father, wrap me in your arms
and father me.

Vamp:

Father, wrap me in your arms,
Father, wrap me in your arms.

Ending:

Father, wrap me in your arms
and father me.⁵

Let Me Be the Man My Daddy Was

He's worth more
Than every star in the sky
With that look of forgiveness
That's always in his eyes

He works so hard
But gentle as a lamb
He gave up so much
To make me just what I am and, oh

Oh, let me be
The man my daddy was
Oh, let me be
The man my daddy was

When I was young
Sometimes foolishly I played
But he reached out and, oh

Showed me the way

Now he's only human
And bound to make mistakes
But it was all right
By the moment I would awake and, oh

Oh, let me be
The man my daddy was
Oh, let me be
The man my daddy was

Sometimes I hope
I don't live to see the day
When he reaches down
And take them both away

And look at my children
Sometimes foolishly they play
Let me live long enough
Let me show them the way

My clothes were sometimes untidy
And that bed was never made
But mom and dad would scold me good
Never doubted I've made the grade

But now that I'm a man
I ask the Lord up above
Please let me raise my children right
And be the man my daddy was and, oh

Oh, let me be
The man my daddy was
Oh, let me be
The man my daddy was

He was a good man
He was a poor man
Oh, let me be.⁶

V. Books for Father's Day

Bolden, Avery. Fathers, the Missing Component in the African-American Family. La Vergne, TN: Lightning Source, 2007.

Gayles, Jean Wade. Father Songs: Testimonies by African-American Sons and Daughters. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997.

Paschal, Angelina M. Voices of African-American Teen Fathers: I'm Doing What I Got to Do. Binghamton, NY, Haworth Press, 2006.

Steptoe, Javaka. In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers. New York, NY: Lee & Low Books, 1997.

Willis, Andre C. Faith of Our Fathers: African-American Men Reflect on Fatherhood. USA: Penguin Group, 1996.

Vassel, Rachel. Daughters of Men: Portraits of African-American Women and Their Fathers. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007.

Notes

1. "The History of Father's Day." Online location: <http://www.holidays.net/father/story.htm> accessed 19 January 2009
2. Williams, George R. "Boys to Men." 7 April 2007. National Center for Fathering. Online location: www.fathers.com accessed 19 January 2009
3. "Real Men Cook." Online location: <http://www.realmencook.com/> accessed 19 January 2009
4. Smith, Will. "Just the Two of Us." Just the Two of Us. Stamford, CT: Antisia Music, 1998.
5. Shekinah Glory Ministry. Father Me. Harvey, IL: Kingdom Records, 2001.
6. Chi-Lites. Let Me Be the Man My Daddy Was. Van Nuys, CA: Unichappell Music, 1969.

