

Good Morning and Happy Anniversary.

I see a few men have that puzzled look on their face. "Have I forgotten my anniversary?" No, you haven't. Today is the 100th anniversary of Father's Day. The very first celebration of Father's Day was exactly 100 years ago in Spokane, Washington.

It all started with a woman named Sonora Dodd who was sitting in church on Mother's Day in 1909 with her family and with her father, William Smart. She realized that men were rarely honored, especially men like her father. William Smart was a veteran of the American Civil war who traveled West after he was discharged, married and had six children before his wife suddenly died. He went on to raise the children by himself, never remarrying. His daughter was struck by the greatness of one of the most ordinary men you could ever meet. She started a petition drive and went to the mayor of Spokane, who agreed with her. When he consulted with her about which month the celebration should be in, she said June because that's when her father celebrated his birthday.

Father's Day was designated a national holiday in 1972 when the president signed the public law that made it permanent. This raises a whole bunch of questions, doesn't it? Like why did it take 62 years to become an official holiday? Why did it take thousands of years of human history to recognize the need for a public declaration about our Father's? I don't have the answer to those questions but I do have some thoughts about fatherhood that I'd like to share with you.

You see, I was extremely fortunate to have a father who was a God loving man, who was ordained a Deacon in his 50's and then sold the family business because he had been hired as a hospital chaplain. He moved from Chicago to central Maine where he was the only chaplain on staff in a mid sized hospital. He did this for a salary of \$18,000 a year. When he died the church was packed with people whom he had touched as part of his ministry. He lived his faith every day of his life and cast a big shadow for my brothers and I to follow in. We loved him and loved his quirks, as well. I know my father would be quoting Proverbs 10:1, "A wise son makes his father proud."

Some of us may have had difficult fathers, or even terrible fathers. We fathers have been accused of being too hard or too soft on our children. But I can tell you, that for the most part, we are doing our best. Sometimes silently, sometimes shouting at the top of our lungs. You see, We come in a wide variety of models. Far too many of us were raised in the image of John Wayne where fathers were the strong silent type, often distant and remote. He exemplified a different set of values that what we espouse today. Men were once sidelined or considered less competent - whether in caring for a newborn or in making important childhood decisions. Mothers were viewed as being better parents and the men withdrew, feeling less confident. They were seen as being less competent as parents. Some became resentful at being left out. All of these things played out in how they parented their children.

Dads need to be encouraged - or as sometimes is the case, **reminded** - to take time to build his own unique relationship with his kids. The research is clear... a close, emotionally connected father-child is a form of risk prevention: it reduces the risk of drug abuse and a whole host of

other mistakes. A close bond becomes a source of health and happiness for the children, their dads and families. Children with emotionally available fathers do better in school, have better peer relationships and relate better with teachers than children with more emotionally distant fathers.

Dads today should strive to be experts about their children - everything from their daily schedule, to the best way to get them to fall asleep. This sends kids a clear message that they are important and the process deepens your bond. Beyond your focus and attention, knowing your kids requires being a skilled listener and it means resisting the temptation to fix, lecture or give unsolicited advice.

We should be telling our children stories from our own youth. Stories of the pressures we faced, what we did for fun, challenges we overcame, who we had a crush on in High School. Letting your children know more about you, what you think and feel on a regular basis is essential to building a healthy connection. Yet knowing all of this we must recognize that fathers are essentially different.

We are like the Canadian geese we see flying North and South at different times of the year. And what have we noticed? One goose leads the way, while the others form a “V” behind him. This goose creates an air flow behind him that the rest of the flock floats on. Scientists have somehow figured out that those following the leader use 71% less energy than the leader. He creates an airflow so that the others can get to their destination without being worn down. He makes their life easier. Everything rides on this lead goose. If he gets lost, every goose in the flock will follow him because he is in charge. He is up front, viewing what lies ahead. He bears an awesome responsibility. The very lives of the flock depend on him, the old and the young,. Everyone is looking to him for guidance, to set the course for their lives. And he does most of this alone. No one is beside him while they are flying, every one is behind him, depending on him. All of the others can follow his path, seeing others in the flock as they make their way. They are part of a larger group and are aware of their position. The lead goose only knows that others are watching his every motion and that they are following in the direction where he leads. When the lead goose tires you will hear the rest of the flock start to “honk” their encouragement. They do not want to get lost, they do not want their leader to fail. They care for him the same way that he is caring for them. It’s a relationship a great deal like our families, isn’t it? Fathers lead the way. They show us how to live a good and decent life. They show us the importance of regular attendance at church and reading the Bible so that it is a part of who we are. They encourage their children to do well in school because they are aware of the consequences of poor grades.

And throughout this whole story we must not forget that fathers are not perfect. We, only occasionally, raise our voices. And rarely, do we ever shout. (I can see my daughters are laughing....) We argue over which radio station we will listen to in the car. I like classical, my daughters like somebody named Justin Bieber....whoever that is. In the Book of Proverbs it says in Chapter 13:1, “A wise son and daughter hear their fathers instruction, but the senseless child pays no attention.” And in Chapter 15:5 it says, “The fool spurns his father’s admonition, but prudent is the one who listens to his wisdom.”

These words were written many thousands of years ago, long before the first Father's Day was conceived. But in them we see the depth of understanding about parental responsibility, about what a good father does. I was thinking about William Smart, the cause of that first Father's Day back in Spokane, and how he raised six children all by himself. He kept on doing what he was supposed to do. He raised his children. He set a good example for them. And his daughter must have turned out alright because she felt such love for her father that she wanted to honor him publicly. We can only imagine how William Smart felt for the rest of his life when he realized that he was the inspiration for Father's Day. That was probably the highest reward he could ever have received for a quiet life of dedication to doing the right thing.

So, how will you celebrate Father's Day? Buy Dad another tie? Make him breakfast or take him out to eat? All those things are fine, but may I offer an alternative or an addition to what you are planning? Spend time with your Dad or, if he is far away, call him regularly, and tell him that you couldn't have had a better father, that despite his faults you love him more than anything else in your life. Those words will last longer than any gift.

Let Us Pray:

Dear Father in Heaven,

We want to thank you for our fathers that you have given to us.

We thank you for the affection that they give to us.

We thank you for their smiles and laughter.

We thank you for their wisdom.

We thank you for their grace.

And we thank you, most of all, for Your love that they share with us.

Amen.