

## Fatherhood / Our Special Father

**Andy:** I have some great memories of being with my dad. Chopping wood for the fire. Going camping. Learning how to drive a car. Going for a walk or a run together. There is no doubt that my dad has had a big influence on the person that I have become today.

**Tammy:** Hello and thank you for joining us again on *Women of Hope*...welcome – I'm Tammy. Carol's here too and so is Fran...and you've just heard Andy talking about *his* dad. Andy has only been a dad himself for a few years. Thanks Andy for coming and sharing some thoughts with us today about what it's like to be a father. Welcome.

**Andy:** Thanks. Being a dad is a big job. It starts with one small baby. The job is huge at that time, but as your children get bigger, it seems that the job gets bigger too.

**Fran:** You should have seen Andy when his first little girl, Emily, was born. He had a smile from one ear to the other – and he kept talking about having the cutest baby in the world!

**Carol:** Well, I'm sure she is! In fact your wife Carolyn was with us one mother's day. I remember her talking about your little girl with her tiny legs twirling to the music and Carolyn couldn't help but get up and dance with her! Does she still love to dance?

**Andy:** Oh yes! And now that she has a little brother – she has someone else to dance with!

**Tammy:** Andy you've come today to talk with us about the importance of being a father haven't you?

**Andy:** Yes I have Tammy. To me, fatherhood starts with the basics - making sure that my family has a safe place to live, has enough to eat and that each one is cared for properly. My first responsibility as a dad is to be the provider and protector of my family. But let's be honest. Being a dad is much more than that. I could have a very well fed family, and still not be a good dad.

**Fran:** That's very true Andy.

**Andy:** Yes...the job of fatherhood seems to grow, not just as the family grows in size with more children, but also as children grow older. A baby only needs food, warmth, and loving cuddles. But young toddlers need patient training and discipline...and they need you to model the right way to behave. Young kids need a lot of quality time with you and they need you to build their confidence. Teenagers need you to listen and try to be understanding. They also need the chance to make a contribution to the family and be involved in decisions that affect them.

Being a parent is not just the task of caring for kids. It's being responsible to teach someone about life, to shape their character and to help them to become the person that God has designed them to be.

**Carol:** That's so true...and the way we as parents behave makes a big difference to the way our children will behave doesn't it?

**Andy:** It sure does. As I go about my daily life, I'm showing my kids what life is about.

As I act as a husband to my wife, I'm showing my little girl what kind of man she should marry. I'm showing my little boy how to treat a woman with love and respect.

As I involve them in doing things for others, I'm teaching them about love in action...how to show love to others. As I work to provide for them, I'm teaching them about sacrifice...and the importance of hard work.

As we read the Bible together, I'm teaching them the importance of God's word. As I take them to church, I'm teaching them the importance of worship. As we share a meal together, I teach them about being thankful for what we have.

**Tammy:** Here on *Women of Hope* Andy has been telling us about how the way he behaves teaches his children how to behave. When he shows love to his wife, Carolyn, he's teaching his little daughter Emily how she should be treated. And he's teaching his little son Jono how to treat his wife when he grows up.

**Andy:** Every day that I live as a dad, I'm helping to set the course for what kind of person my child will become.

I recently went through a parenting course with some other parents. Part of the first session was about fathers and the very important role that fathers play in the house. I learned through that course that an effective father needs to first be an effective husband. So in order to be a good dad to my kids, I need to be a good husband to my wife. Here's some of the things that I have learned recently:

Firstly, I need to tell my wife that I appreciate her. I need to thank her for the many things that she does for me and the family.

Secondly, I need to show my wife honor, serving her and giving her my full attention when she needs it.

Thirdly, I need to talk to my wife about what's going on in the family, so that we can reach agreement together about how we will parent our children.

Finally, I need to be willing to understand why my wife does what she does (for example, why does she give the kids a particular food, or not let them play with particular toys?). Once I understand why, I can help her in the home, rather than making her feel frustrated, because I want to do things differently.

When I invest in my marriage, I am investing in something that gives my kids a loving and stable home. When I show my kids that my wife is the most important woman in the world to me, I'm showing them the kind of love and respect that they should *also* have for their mom.

If all I ever did was feed and clothe my children, I would only be doing part of the job. To be a proper dad to my kids means I have to do things that take my time. Quality time.

**Carol:** Tell us more about *quality time* Andy – what does that look like?

**Andy:** Quality time is different to ordinary time. It is the time when people connect together in a very special way. It comes in short moments, usually when you are spending time doing other things. Quality time can be the little talk that happens while we walk to the park together. It might be the hug that we give when our child falls over. Quality time might come from the questions they ask at the end of story time, rather than rushing them off to bed.

Quality time is not something that I can control. I can't always choose when it will happen or how long it will last. Only a part of the time that I spend together with my kids will be quality time. Other times will be nice, but they will not always be as special as quality time. The only thing I know is that the more time I spend with my kids, the more likely I am to have quality time with them. So in order to get plenty of quality time, I have to be willing to spend lots of time with my kids.

**Fran:** That's not always easy to do is it? I know you have a very busy job. And you're also involved in many other things – mostly things that help other people...

**Andy:** Yes Fran, it's important for me to do those things too. So I have to really work hard at making sure I make time for the family as well. I need to be around my family *often* enough and for *long* enough so that I can be part of those important moments. I need to spend time with my kids in a way that we are just together, without having any particular plan, without time pressure - just doing the things that we love to do, together.

And here's an important one - I need to have some time with each of my kids alone. As they grow up, these will become the times that they will talk to me about things that are important in their lives. I also need time with both of them together...time together with my *whole* family.

**Carol:** Andy, thank you so much for taking the time with us...to tell us how you feel about your family...and how important it is to spend that quality time with them. Maybe you can come back again when the children are a bit older and tell us some more about what you're learning as a dad.

**Andy:** You're welcome.

**Tammy:** In a moment, Fran is going to talk to us about God – our father! Andy, maybe you would like to stay as we talk about this together?

**Andy:** Sure, I'd love to!

**Tammy:** It's so nice to have you here with us today Fran. It was good to hear Andy talking about how to be a good Dad, wasn't it?

**Fran:** Yes, I've watched Andy with his little girl and boy, and they really love their Dad. And Marvin's here too - the table's getting quite crowded today.

**Marvin:** Hi there. I'm glad to be here, too.

**Fran:** We're going to talk some more about fathers - or one special Father.

Have you heard people pray to God and start with the words, 'Dear Father in heaven'? Perhaps you've heard us pray like that. God is the great creator who made the whole universe; so, what do *you* think about the idea of calling him our Father?

**Carol:** Not everyone thinks about God like that. Some people think God is so high and mighty that we couldn't possibly know him in a personal way – like a father.

**Tammy:** And other people have told me that they think 'God' is just a word for the energy of the universe, or the energy that is in each person. Then there are others who think there are many spirits rather than one creator God. I wonder how you think about God.

**Fran:** Long ago God called a group of people to follow him, and he gave them his good laws to live by. They knew God was their creator and that he was holy and expected them to follow his ways. I think they were sometimes a bit frightened of his power and holiness. God told them he was the father of their nation (Ex 4:22). But I don't think they thought of him as their *own* father in a close family way.

But at least one person understood that idea. Do you remember I've talked about David, who wrote many of the Psalms or songs that are in the Bible? David was the youngest of 8 boys: I wonder if he was a bit special to his daddy? See what you think; I'm going to ask Marvin to read you words from some of David's songs.

**Marvin:** A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. (Ps 68:5)

You defend the fatherless and oppressed, so that mortal men may not terrify them. (Ps 10:18)

**Fran:** That's an amazing thought, isn't it - that God has a special care for those who have no earthly father to look after them. Because sadly, other people often do terrify children who are vulnerable. God sees and judges that. Listen, here's something else David wrote.

**Marvin:** As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who reverence him, for he knows what we're made of, he remembers that we're just dust. (103:13-14)

**Fran:** David's thinking about a really good, loving father, who understands the weakness of his children and has compassion on them. Marvin, when your children were small, did you expect them to know as much as you did, or be as strong as you?

**Marvin:** No, of course I didn't. I tried to remember what they couldn't do, and helped them to do better.

**Andy:** You know, I can think of a good example. My young girl Emily now has a bicycle, but doesn't really know how to ride it yet. I have learned that when she asks "Daddy, can I please ride my bike?" that is actually her way of asking me to push her around the yard while she just sits on

the bike with her feet in the air! I have to remember that one day she will be able to ride by herself, but for now I have to do most of the pushing.

**Fran:** Marvin, can you read those words of David again?

**Marvin:** As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who reverence him, for he knows what we're made of, he remembers that we're just dust.

**Fran:** You know, I think David means God is like that; he understands how we make mistakes easily. God knows all about our weak human nature. If we come to him with proper respect, admitting our faults, David says, he will forgive us and help us to do better. And David knew that from his own experience...he wasn't always good by any means! I'll tell you about that another day. But he did learn that God was a wonderful, forgiving Father. Now Marvin, what else did David write about fathers?

**Marvin:** Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me. (Ps 27:10)

**Fran:** Andy, you talked about your memories of time with your father and how you learned from him didn't you!

**Andy:** Yes – my dad was good at spending quality time with me...as we chopped wood together, and went camping – and lots of other things. It has really helped me to know how to be a good father.

**Fran:** What are your memories of your father? Do you have good memories, so that the word 'father' is sweet to you? I hope you do. But maybe your own father wasn't kind and compassionate. We like to think that parents are always good and loving, but sadly, that's not always true. And none of us had perfect parents,

**Tammy:** ...and none of us *is* a perfect parent either!

**Andy:** That's so true Tammy – I've only talked about the good stuff today...I haven't told you about the mistakes I've made. But you know, you can really learn from your mistakes – and change your behavior. I'm sure I will do plenty of that kind of learning in the future too.

**Fran:** But God is a perfect parent. He always loves us and does what is best for us. He disciplines us too, so that we can grow more like him in our character (Hebrews 12). So if the word 'father' is a bitter one for you, you can think of God as the perfect father you didn't always have. God understands, he's always there for you.

**Carol:** Here on *Women of Hope*, Fran is telling us about God – the perfect father, and about David who wrote in the Bible about God our father...

**Fran:** Yes, Jesus lived on earth long after David - in fact, he was a descendant of David. Jesus often talked about his Father in heaven. Of course God was his Father in a special, unique way. But Jesus also said that we can know God as our Father too. Let me tell you a little story from God's word the Bible.

One day Jesus was praying quietly. His followers were there, and when he had finished praying one of them said, 'Lord, will you teach us to pray, like John taught his followers?' John was a prophet and preacher of that time.

So Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say  
'Our Father in heaven, may your holy name be honored. May your kingdom come. Give us day by day the food we need. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive everyone who does us wrong. And don't bring us to hard testing.'" Luke 11, Matt 6.

Then Jesus said, 'You fathers, tell me: if your boy asks you for bread, would you give him a stone instead? Would you give him a snake when he asks for a fish? Bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!' (Matt 7:9-11)

**Fran:** Have you ever heard this prayer? It's the most well-known prayer in the Bible, called The Lord's Prayer. Now did you notice the way it started?... 'Our Father in Heaven!' He actually invited his followers to come to God as their *Father*, and tell him what they need, and ask for his forgiveness and help. And you know, he invites *you* too. He knows you already, he loves you already, and he wants you to know him as your loving Father.

**Carol:** If you ask him sincerely, God will forgive you for all your weaknesses and the wrong things you've done. He can do that because his son Jesus has taken the punishment for all our sins when he died on the cross for us. You can become a child of God by putting your trust in Jesus. If your heart longs to know God as your loving father, that's where to start. You can ask God today to make you his own child. Then you can say '*my* Father...'

**Tammy:** Well, our time is up, it's been good to spend time together today, and I think we have a lot to think about - how to be good parents, and how to know God as our perfect parent. Thank you Andy and Marvin: I'm glad we *Women of Hope* have some good friends who are men too.

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