

Today is the special day when we celebrate Father's and all those special fathering qualities that, with mothering, make a balanced parenting experience. There are two reasons I like to celebrate the qualities of fathering over the celebration of the 'Father' person. Firstly because I believe there are many females as well as males who share those special qualities, and secondly for those who may not have had a good fathering experience in their lives. Whose father figure was a negative influence.

I came across an article that stated the following nine qualities as being the most important for a person to be a good father.

Qualities Of A 'Good Father'

- One who is protective
- Affection as middle name
- A wall of trust and security
- The source of encouragement
- Has the patience to listen
- Provides the necessities of life
- Respects the mother of the children
- One who is fun to spend time with
- One who is the best teacher

If I am perfectly honest, based on that criteria I don't think that I could say I have had a 'good' father. There are many categories where he fell short, but he is **my** dad, and although not close to perfect, I know that he loves me and that he does his best for me and I wouldn't change him for the world. I have been very fortunate where I know of others who have been less so! But fathering and mothering are both far more than just ticking off criteria on a checklist. There is an 'X Factor' to the perfect parenting and that doesn't make an appearance on the above list. It is the fundamental factor of love. Total, complete unconditional love, and my guess is that is something that comes into being, to some extent, the moment the parent takes the new born child into its arms.

Of course, however great that love is, it will always be conditional in some way because we are human and sadly we are unable to reach the heights of perfect love however much we might try. But the amazing thing is God is able to give to every person the 'perfect love' that humans crave. We might be able to look at our earthly fathers and point out the flaws and remember the times where we felt let down, but we cannot do that with our Heavenly Father. He loves us perfectly because he is love, and whether we choose to acknowledge his love or not makes no difference to it's being!

Although it is an unconditional love it is not a love without expectation! When we accept and receive so great a love then there is a trigger within us that seeks to respond, and God longs for us to respond in the very best way that we can.

Our Heavenly Father is our protector, but he allows us to maintain our free will within that protection. He doesn't take away life's challenges but he walks with us, enabling us to go through life's experiences and grow through them. When we trust ourselves to God's will, we are under his protection and in the safest place it is possible to be.

Our heavenly Father encourages us to achieve our fullest potential. Sometimes our best is different to other times. God doesn't expect perfection but encourages us to give things a go and to put heart

and soul into everything we do. He doesn't set the bar higher than we can achieve, whatever we might think.

Our Heavenly Father is also our provider, not necessarily of all that we want, but he provides for our needs. He will do this in many ways and through people and circumstances. God wants to be involved in our lives. He wants to give us good things. He wants to share the abundance of his goodness. When we go it alone, when we seek to be self sufficient, when we don't want to bother him because he has other people to care about, we deny God the fathering role of provider. However, God wants us to be part of his provision. We don't just sit back and take, we are given the opportunity to be involved. But, even when we don't do our bit, even when we are foolhardy to desperation, God still wants us to go to him. He doesn't go off in a huff and refuse to bail us out. He doesn't sulk, leaving us in our need. And possibly even better, he doesn't rub our mistakes in, he would rather forgive and rub our mistakes out! He doesn't make us pay 'big time' for our wilfulness, lack of trust or stubborn independence!

Our Heavenly Father gave to us the best ever role model, someone we can aspire to, who we will want to emulate! Jesus Christ.

- He shows us the way
- He doesn't expect perfection but encourages us to be the best we can, in every circumstance.
- He wants to be involved, to be part of our lives.
- He doesn't want us to shut him out, to keep him at arms length, or to manage without him.
- He loves us and he wants us to know and experience that love to heights and depths of eternity.
- He doesn't want us to judge his fathering by our earthly experience of fathering which will always be flawed.

It's all about our heart! It's not just about the end result, but the heart we do it with. And it's about his heart, loving us to death, and beyond.

So as we celebrate Father's Day let us remember and give thanks to, and for, all those who have shared good fathering qualities. Let us try to understand, reconcile and forgive the things that have been less than they should have been, and let us embrace the perfect Fatherly love wholly available and freely given by our Creator God.