
Dad Guilt

There is no doubt that many fathers feel guilty about the way they act as fathers in family life. This guilt is often associated with a feeling of inadequacy that arises for a variety of reasons. These could be that they are not providing either physically – in terms of housing, and other finance related issues, or emotionally – that they feel that they are not able to express themselves in a loving way.

Sometimes, as a result of this, dads can over compensate. They might spend more time at work to earn more money to provide more ‘materially’ for their family. In an emotional way, they may try to compensate for lack of emotion by showing their ‘love’ through many gifts, holidays and suchlike.

Another area of ‘felt’ failure may be that they do not, or are not able, to spend as much time with their family as they would like. This can arise because of a need to work longer hours because there are so many demands in the current workplace. It may be that their genuine felt needs of strong commitment to ecclesial (church) life results in them attending many ecclesial meetings because this is expected of them to demonstrate their love for their God. And by showing such commitment, is this not an example to their family of the way a full Christian life should be lived? (I recall that in my younger days as a parent, I grew up in a broad ecclesial environment where some ecclesial members were very proud that they only had one night at home during the week as they were attending so many ecclesial meetings!)

These, and many other aspects of life, can contribute to ‘dad guilt’. So, where do we start to address this? Of course, **we start with God’s Word concurrently with prayer**. The Bible provides the foundation for all our living. While Scripture does not provide minute details on our contemporary daily life, it does provide the basis on which we make decisions.

The Start

This commences with our commitment to living a life of service to God and His Son. If this is the basis of our life, then it will provide us with a sure foundation for our decisions. The next step is to realise that if we have made a commitment to family life, then we need to recognise that families are God given and therefore need to be a central part of our life. Accordingly, we will work to ensure that we will balance all of our activities around our complete life – which means that we recognise the centrality of the family alongside our need to work for our living and contribute to ecclesial life. **This is often easier said than done**. If our work is demanding, and in contemporary society, this can often be the case, we still have to work out the best way to balance our particular circumstances so that we spend enough time on family life as part of our overall life in God’s service. Sometimes it is necessary for a mum (wife) to work as well, just to make “ends meet”. And, mums often like to work to make use of their God given talents in His service. If we sometimes lose balance, this is where dad guilt can enter.

How do we establish a balance?

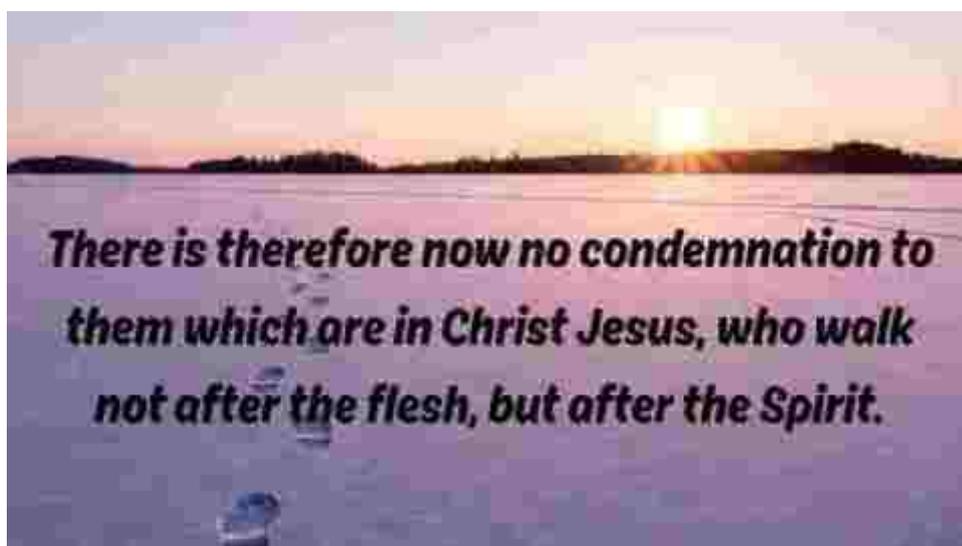
There is no universal solution for all circumstances. However, what is required is for dad and mum to discuss what they see as a balance. And, where possible, this might involve the children in the family, even the younger ones. This way the whole family can learn to understand the issues and help resolve the problems they face.

Some Scriptures will help

A key verse for a general principle of balance is Philippians 4:5 "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand." (KJV) This verse is in a context where the Apostle is writing about general issues of life. Paul speaks similarly to the Corinthians: "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training." (1-9:25) Such training involves balance in all aspects of life not just running on a track. And, as usual, we find wisdom in the Proverbs (25:27) "It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honorable to seek one's own honor." Solomon here is using his poetic leaning to simply say, 'Too much of one thing (honey) does not provide a necessary balance in a diet'. Similarly, too much of one thing in life, does not provide a balance necessary for dads to be good.

Some practical examples of overcoming dad guilt

The first thing to realise is that **no dad is perfect**. While we strive to be perfect, we will not be until we are made that way in the Kingdom. When we review aspects of our life as dads, we will often realise that there are some mistakes we made and some things we could have done better. The best plan is, if practicable, to talk over our error with the son or daughter concerned, recognise our mistake, (say "I'm sorry"!) ask their forgiveness and endeavour to ensure we don't repeat it. This is far more positive and forward looking than lingering negatively with guilt.



Given that we are not perfect dads, we still need to realise that God will work through us. The Bible indicates that He worked through other imperfect dads – Jacob was one, and another was David. One verse that is very helpful: Romans 8:1 "There is

now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."(NIV) God will always help us, by His grace, through our difficulties.

The best thing we can do is pray for His forgiveness and guidance, and move forward.