

FOCUS ON FAITH

Stephen G. Derges, Pastor of Bridgnorth Baptist Church



THE HARDEST JOB IN THE WORLD?

I don't know if it ever crosses your mind but there are so many demanding jobs in the world.

There are the obvious ones of course that include government responsibility, such as the economy, international relations, the maintenance of law and order and security or the environment. There are those in the commercial arena who deal with huge financial budgets and targets or the management and control of large numbers of staff and liaison with external stakeholders. And we shouldn't forget the teachers and lecturers who inspire and inform future generations. All of these roles come with massive accountabilities.

Then there are the not so obvious – the bus and train drivers or pilots who have the task of taking thousands each day safely to their destinations; the cleaners in our hospitals, hotels or other public areas and workplaces who help prevent the spread of disease or those who work with people who are disadvantaged in some way.

But the role that many of us find the most difficult is probably that of parent and I think that's especially true for dads. Whilst countless men find it easy to make decisions of enormous importance at work when it comes to our children's questions or demands often the response is, "Ask your mum".

...the role of fathers isn't particularly well defined and many of us don't really know what's expected of us!

There are probably scores of reasons for this including the stereo-typical rationalisation that it's the mother's job to handle the kids so we men shouldn't interfere or get involved.

But I believe it's more deep seated than that.

The role of fathers isn't particularly well defined and many of us don't really know what's expected of us! There may be myriads of self-help and other instructional resources available but it's really "on the job training" that counts – and as Revd Colin's Resch's "Prayer for the Week" implies, that usually involves making mistakes.

In other cases perhaps we've had poor role models in our upbringing. Thankfully I didn't and my dad was and continues to be very supportive, but that doesn't necessarily make me a better father to my two (now adult) children – just ask them I'm sure they have a long list of my failings and inadequacies. However I hope they may possibly have a few examples of instances where I didn't do too badly.

So with Father's Day this coming Sunday I'd like us to pause for a few moments and consider what makes a good father? The combination of numerous characteristics, attributes and

abilities: perseverance, stability, sacrifice, consistence, integrity, patience are just a few.

But of course the first, and undoubtedly to me, the key criterion is love and that is also demonstrated in a variety of ways:

- By being there when problems arise and not abdicating or avoiding involvement in our children's lives especially when they make mistakes
- Encouraging and supporting and especially celebrating success or a wholehearted attempt to succeed
- Discipline – in many different ways including saying "No" when appropriate
- Preparing our children to be able to live independent lives – at some stage or other they have to stand on their own two feet and we can't always bail them out
- Through helping to define standards of behaviour and personal values.

It's easy to look around and criticise the way our young people act but to be honest the issue really lies with us as adults. After all where do they look for inspiration? Primarily from those of us who have gone before. Children don't unilaterally decide to misbehave or be insolent and disrespectful – it's a learned behaviour which they inherit from those who are older. Many sociologists and family experts believe part of our social problems lies with "absentee fathers" – those who have gone AWOL. They may not have left physically but perhaps their presence in their children's lives is so limited that their influence is diluted.

Psalms 103:13 refers to God our heavenly father having compassion on those who fear (i.e. respect and honour) Him.

And that to me is the key – let's respect and honour firstly God and then one another including our children.

Parenthood is a challenge but it's also an amazing privilege; it may be demanding but the rewards are immeasurable.

And thankfully there are numerous, often unsung, heroes out there who are determined to do the best they can.

To find out more about the Christian faith and resources available plus information on local Churches together with contact details, please log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk.