

Responsible Fathers

"That's why I hate you," my son said as I pulled the plug on his video game, after being told several times to cut it off. It was late. It was time for him to go to bed, and the video game needed to be turned off. Needless to say this retort stayed in my gut...until I went back to his room and told him, "I didn't care if he hated me...as long as he did what he was told."

There...I'd asserted myself. I was not his friend. I was his dad. My stomach turned over as I tried to sleep, trying to come up with a plan for a teenager. The next morning was not much better, but I'd resolved to show some patience, some resolve...and so I apologized for what I said. As dads we have to find a way to go beyond our machismo and show our sons we are bigger than guilt.

"The spirit of reconciliation is stronger than hatred," the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christian said as he accepted an apology from Pope John Paul II for Catholic involvement in the sacking of Constantinople 800 years ago.

Some times I don't like my son's behavior. Sometimes I feel like Job, and curse the day I thought having children would be something I would never forget. Well, my son is making sure of that. Yet each day...somehow I manage to find a way to bless him each morning, by making the sign of the cross on his forehead. Somehow I manage to make it to my knees, or lift my voice to ask God to bless him, and help me. Somehow I know I'm not struggling alone, that why I'm sharing that here...because I also know he's not struggling alone.

We dads have baggage. We feel the world ignores us and owes us. We think everyone takes us for granted. That may be true, but the thing we cannot forget: we are responsible. Our children did not decide to be here, therefore, it was our choice to have them, and like it or not, we are stuck with them. We must not forget that. Also, we must not forget, we are not alone. Misery does love company.

It's a struggle...nothing in life that is worth anything is easy. If it were, we wouldn't have the full appreciation for a house we bought, a friendship we kept, a reconciliation we made, or a race we won. The key is to not quit, and share the ups and downs with others. It keeps us sane. I write this column, to hopefully give some joy, hope, or spirit to some father who thinks he's been forgotten. Believe me you are not. And your sons are the ones who will remember you the most...if you let them.

I often have to remind myself I have the sons my mother wished on me. But through it all, I know she loved me in spite of myself. I must also cherish that memory as I try to keep pushing my son to be better, while also remembering, he's not from bad stock. Is that what worries us men sometimes? We think our sons are more like us than we are willing to admit? If that's the case...give it up. I often tell my son I expect him to be better than I am...but I think somewhere I might harbor the wish that he doesn't quite make it.

Sometimes it's our own selfish resolve to control them, and the situations around them that often allow friction to develop, seethe, and explode. It's not worth it, and in

the end, as I have found, on big issues, they know who they want in their corner. That's becomes the most important thing I think we can try to do...make sure they can take care of themselves; that they do the right thing; and know that if they can't decide what is right—they can ask us. Let them hate us...but at least be sure they know they can talk to us.

We must never forget when we are in the midst of these struggles that we are the ones responsible for turning them into men. It is our instruction that will one day turn them into someone's father. With that resolve, remember, our work will never be done.

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