

Fatherhood

Sunday 7 Sept 2025 – Mark Dohrmann



I was the eldest child. When I was five, it was *“Spare the rod, spoil the child”*.

One day I angered Mum – her fearsome sentence – *“Wait till your father comes home”*

He arrived. They conferred, I was taken and smacked or strapped. I’ve forgotten all those details, except Mum – *“Look what you’ve done to your father!”* I was dragged into the bathroom to see his head on his arm against the wall, sobbing.

As I grew older, this evidence of a soft, sensitive Dad meant a lot to me. He was no “softie” – at the age of 22 he was in charge of 50 men – a fighter pilot, in serious warfare. A brave, tough, disciplined man. But he had that vulnerable, sensitive core in there. Thank God.

Being a father is one of the most profound and transformative experiences a person can go through. It’s a role that demands responsibility, patience, love, and continuous growth. Fatherhood is not something you can prepare for in advance—it unfolds moment by moment, shaping both father and child simultaneously.

Being a father means showing up and being present - not just physically, but emotionally and mentally. Whether it's changing nappies at 2 a.m., turning up at school concerts, listening to teenage concerns, or offering life advice, the presence of a father can leave a lasting impression. A child may not remember every word a father says, but they will remember how he made them feel - safe, valued, and loved.

Fatherhood is a delicate balance between protecting and letting go. In the early years, a father is a guardian, ensuring the child's safety and providing a stable foundation. As children grow older, the role shifts to being a guide and mentor. Teaching my kids how to ride a bike was a good example: holding on for support, then letting go with trust. Watching them fall, get back up, and try again was painful and beautiful. It’s a reminder that being a father is not about eliminating every obstacle but helping a child face them with courage and confidence.

One of the great challenges of being a father is learning that you won’t always get it right. Mistakes are inevitable. There will be times of frustration, times of misunderstanding, and moments of regret. But fatherhood is also about humility - apologizing when necessary, learning from those mistakes, and doing better next time. Children don’t need a perfect father; they need an honest one.

I was regaling one of my teenage daughter’s friends (who appeared fascinated by my wisdom) when said daughter sailed through from the bathroom, hair wrapped in a towel. Without breaking step she barked *“Ignore him!”*

Being a father brings immense joy. I had an overwhelming sense of love, wonder, and awe when my first child was born, and the same for the next three. It's an instant connection that bonds you in ways that words cannot fully describe. There are moments of laughter that echo for years - silly conversations, shared interests, in-house jokes, and milestones reached. A father gets to witness the unfolding of a life, to see pieces of himself reflected in another person, yet shaped in unique and surprising ways.

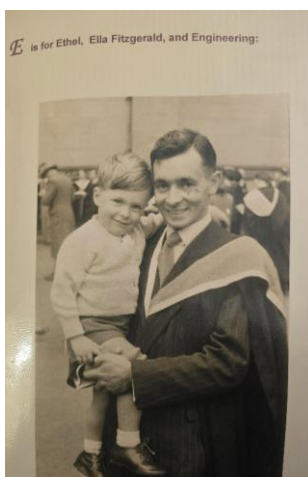
Fatherhood also becomes a journey of emotional growth. It teaches vulnerability, patience, and the ability to love selflessly. Raising kids has challenged me to try and become a better version of myself. It has forced me to confront my own flaws, to examine my priorities, and to learn new skills. Fathers often experience an increased sense of self-worth and purpose as they realize the importance of their role. Being a father often brings out qualities in men that they may never have experienced - empathy, patience, even self-sacrifice. And also, for my Dad – determination. He loved his cars. After a few incidents we took his keys away. He trammed it out east from the Aged Care place, then walked a mile to pinch them back.

While the road can be difficult, the rewards are incomparable. There is huge joy in watching a child grow into a unique individual, knowing that you helped shape who they are. Fatherhood offers a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment that can't be replicated in any other aspect of life. Shared moments of laughter, celebration, even hardship form a bond that lasts a lifetime.

Importantly, fatherhood doesn't always look the same. Some fathers are biological, others are adoptive or stepfathers, and some take on the role as mentors or guardians. What defines a father is not how the role began, but how it is lived - through consistent love, effort, and care.

These days, more fathers are embracing emotional openness, active caregiving, and shared parenting. This shift is not only good for children, who gain a more rounded support system, but also for fathers themselves, who experience deeper emotional fulfillment. Dad taught me (without knowing) that expressing emotional honesty in a close relationship opens the heart.

In the end, being a father is not just about raising a child - it's also about growing alongside them. It's a lifelong journey of love, learning, sacrifice, and connection. And while it can be one of the hardest jobs in the world, it is also one of the most meaningful.



So, I thank my Dad – what a man – a convert who passed me his faith – faith in the God who from the beginning has revealed Himself to us as *God the Father*.