

# Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

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Date: June 20, 2021  
Sermon: "A Little Fatherly Advice for Dads and Grads"  
Pastor: Rev. David Johnson Rowe  
Scripture: Father's Day Scripture Litany

## Scripture Litany for Father's Day

Leader: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
(Matthew 6:9)

**Congregation: Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the earth.**  
(Exodus 20:12)

Leader: For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
(Isaiah 9:6)

**Congregation: Rejoice before God, praise God, for God is a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, he sets the lonely in families.**  
(Psalm 68:4-6)

**TOGETHER: In my Father's house are many rooms, I will prepare a place for you.**

**I and the Father are one . . . whoever has seen me has seen the Father.**  
(John 10:30, John 14:9, John 14:2)

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Those are powerful and poignant scriptures we just read. One is from the 10 Commandments, "Honor your father and your mother." That's why we used it on Mother's Day a month ago. It's a reminder that there are people who have unique roles in our lives, unique places in our lives. And when we become one of them, we find out pretty quickly what a double whammy it is to be a mother or a father or any version of either.

Then there is Jesus's invitation to us to think of God as father and just see him—

Jesus—as fully one in that role. Elevating fatherhood is something way beyond gender, DNA, and breadwinner, the customary identifiers. Jesus takes us deeper, Always deeper. Anyway, Alida said to me, “You preach on “Grads and Dads Sunday.” Grads and dads. Two ends of the spectrum. Both accomplishments. Both worthy of celebration.

I’ve done both. I’ve had enough graduations to declare I’m not taking another test till Judgment Day (which I hope is graded on a curve). And I’m not taking another driver’s test. I don’t even want to sit for another eye test.

As for “fathering,” I qualify on multiple levels: father, grandfather, Godfather, uncle, coach, mentor—all the ways of having an impact on someone’s life, from the category of being a male. And let’s say at the start there are qualities of mothering that we highlight on Mother’s Day that are open to all of us; there are qualities of fathering that we highlight on Father’s Day open to all of us.

Well, let’s start with “Grads.” Nowadays, kids graduate from nursery school, which is kind of cool. Kids get little caps and gowns and diplomas. I remember when my daughter graduated from law school; they had a special graduation celebration for the kids of the law school grads. They, too, they said, had persevered and accomplished. So whether it’s nursery school, middle school, high school, college, or grad school, two things are true: No. 1, congratulations! It is an accomplishment. No. 2, get ready for the next step: you’re not done yet! I do know that our kids suffer from that conversation that I have with our Church kids all the time. In fact, I did that at a graduation party Friday night. A young man came up to me and said, “David, I just graduated from Williams!” And I said, “Congratulations! What’s next?” The poor kid had no chance to dwell in the joy of accomplishment. So listen to me. instead, take a moment to feel proud you did it.

There is no city in America more associated with colleges than Boston. So from early May through early June, Boston is full of graduations—graduation speakers, graduation advice, graduation rituals, and graduation news. *The Boston Globe*, observing all this, had a headline that declared, in effect, “All right, you did it. Just not what you expected.”

For anybody graduating from anywhere this year, almost half of his or her school experience was majorly warped. Online learning, hybrid, or in person with half the class absent, everyone masked, interaction stilted, athletic careers upended, seasons canceled, school activities curtailed. Proms, internships, summer jobs. Everything out the window or morphed into something strange. But strange can be good, we learned. Our son Andres graduated from Northeastern on Mother’s Day with his master’s degree. It should’ve been a big deal. By the time you factor in Covid restrictions, safe distancing, mandated masks, only one guest allowed sounds pretty disappointing. Except! The graduation was held at Fenway Park!

America's most iconic baseball stadium, home of the Red Sox. Yes, strange can be very good, very cool, very much fun.

Today's graduates head toward their next step with a great lesson resounding in their heads: strange can be good, change can be good, you have learned the power of Plan B, plan C, Plan D. You have learned the art of resilience. You've made a lot of lemonade out of lemons. You've turned looking for a silver lining into an Olympic sport.

In my career I've spoken at all kinds of schools, from grammar school in India to Harvard Business School, from Georgetown and Princeton to Fairfield Ludlowe High School, and I almost always tell the same Bible story. When Jesus was 12, his family took him to Jerusalem. After a while they got separated. His frantic parents couldn't find him for three days. Can you imagine losing your kids in New York City for three days? Well, they finally found him, the Bible says, in the Temple, the intellectual and religious heart of Israel, standing among the great adult learned minds of his day, and here's the key: the Bible says, Jesus was "listening and asking questions." *Listening and asking questions*. Those are the two most important qualities for success as graduates head off to the next step. *Listen*. It doesn't say *agree*. It doesn't say *swallow*. It doesn't say *parrot*. It says *listen*.

Whether it's off to college, grad school, or a job, open up your ears, open up your mind. Start with the humility that God has more to teach you, you have more to learn, and your greatest growth spurt is about to happen. But the second part is equally crucial: Ask questions. Raise your hand. Speak up. Don't be afraid to make a pest of yourself.

There are three reasons to ask a question. No. 1, you don't understand. No. 2, you need clarification. No. 3, you disagree. But take it from Jesus. Remember that he is, the Son of God, the Messiah, the one guy who could reasonably be a Mr. Know-It-All, and he's got the humility and openness to listen. And the boldness to ask questions.

And take it from me; I am the biggest school failure you'll ever meet. I wasted years of great schools, great teachers, great classes. I know how *not* to do your next step. So I'm telling you: go to class, open your mind, spread your wings, and a very 60s thing to say, "Bloom where you are planted." Your dorm. Your classroom. Your team. Your campus. Your friends group. Make it work for you. "Bloom" right there.

There's a course you've never even considered taking that you'll just love. There's a teacher that can't wait to meet you, to have you knock on their door or raise

your hand. There's a campus activity that needs your involvement. There is a possibility, an opportunity, and a wide-open door ready just for you.

Consider all this as "fatherly advice," a good segue into the Father's Day part of the sermon. And if my kids or grandkids were up here today, they'd tell you, "Yeah, that's David. Nonstop advice."

They've all been subjected to my "going off to college," "going out into the world" lectures. Literally lectures, a series of lectures, often delivered over several days, then provided in written form. It was as much fun as it sounds!

But that's part of parenting, of fathering, of mothering, mentoring. As we grow up, grow older, we accumulate wisdom, experience, stories. That's what makes us "elders." The scars and bruises of life, the accomplishments and achievements of life, the disasters and honors of life—they're all worth their weight in gold. So share it. Older people—don't hide it. Younger people—don't ignore it.

Father's Day parallels Mother's Day. We're all honoring somebody or being honored. We all remember somebody or being remembered. Lessons learned. Experiences shared. The Bible was written in ancient times within ancient cultures, trying to present universal truths to make the world a better place.

A lot of it is obvious: don't cheat in business, don't lie or steal. A lot of it is philosophical: turn the other cheek, forgive one another. A lot of it is historical: Israel did this or that; there was this king and that queen who were good or bad. A lot of it is religious: go to church, make an offering, say a prayer. Some of that is esoteric, hard to grasp, hard to pin down: the Trinity, God. When it comes to God, the Bible tries to describe the indescribable, to define the indefinable, to imagine the unimaginable.

At first, God is given an unpronounceable name, YHWH. Then we are told not to make any image at all of God whatsoever. Then we are told God is a spirit. Hard to grasp, literally. Hard to relate to.

So the Bible loosens up. Gives us word images for God. God as king, God as Judge, God as Father. All in the best sense of the words. Whatever is the best you've had in a father, whatever is the best you've been as a father, whatever is the best you wanted, needed in a father, see that in your relationship with God. Be that in your relationship with others.

I'll close with a story that brings it all together. My father made a surprise visit to me my freshman year in college. It happened to be the day that the baseball coach posted the names of those who made the team. My name was not on it.

I'd been captain of my high school baseball team. Now I couldn't even make the freshman team. My father showed up that afternoon. I didn't talk with him about it, tried to be blasé about it, no big deal, it's all cool. Then he drives home. The next day I'm in the gym, and the baseball coach starts screaming at me, "Rowe! What's wrong with you? Everyone's picked up his or her uniform but you! C'mon! You better be ready on time!" And then he added a few colorful words for emphasis.

What happened? I have no idea. It was decades before I connected my father's surprise visit to my sudden selection for the baseball team. I never asked him about it. He never said anything. The coach never explained. But there is something there about God about parenting, about growing up. Above all, there is mystery in that story, the great attribute of God. And there is miracle, intervention, believing in someone, having your back, second chances. All wrapped up in wonder.

It's true of grads. It's true of dads. It's true of life.

### **A Prayer for the Graduates**

*To share in your lives has been our joy; to grow with you in faith has been our blessing. Now and in the days ahead may the spirit of our loving God be with you. May you always find joy and life's promise, and may you serve gladly, knowing you have much to give. Our prayers and our love surround you from this day forward. Amen*

Let's close with Hymn No. 56, "For the Beauty of the Earth"

*For the beauty of the earth,  
for the beauty of the skies,  
for the love which from our birth  
over and around us lies,  
Lord of all, to thee we raise  
this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For the beauty of each hour  
of the day and of the night,  
hill and vale, and tree and flower,  
sun and moon, and stars of light,  
Lord of all, to thee we raise  
this our hymn of grateful praise*

*For the joy of ear and eye,  
for the heart and mind's delight,  
for the mystic harmony  
linking sense to sound and sight,  
Lord of all, to thee we raise  
this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For the joy of human love,  
brother, sister, parent, child,  
friends on earth, and friends above,  
for all gentle thoughts and mild,  
Lord of all, to thee we raise  
this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For thy church that evermore  
lifteth holy hands above,  
offering up on every shore  
one pure sacrifice of love,  
Lord of all, to thee we raise  
this our hymn of grateful praise.*