What Daddy Means

A Father's Day Challenge

By Michael A. Tucker

I love it when a preacher gets to the nitty-gritty.

"Making a baby is easy," he tells the Father's Day congregation. "Being a father is something else."

The amen corner is electrified.

"Making a baby doesn't make you a father," he concludes, ". . . or a man!"

The whole church erupts.

That happened when I was in my early teens but I understood what the preacher was getting at—responsibility. And since I was the preacher's kid, I was expected to behave so I wouldn't get a girl "in trouble." I didn't, and I'm glad I didn't because now that I'm 33, married, and have a two-year-old son, I'm compelled to say my Dad was on the money.

The difference between making a baby and being a father is vast — an obvious point but one too many men who father children forget.

The love that created Christopher, witnessing his birth, and decorating his nursery with teddy bears and colorful mobiles did not prepare me for the awesome responsibility I'll carry the rest of my life.

I wonder if there's any magic I can conjure to prepare Christopher for life in turn-of-the-century America. I wonder about the world, our country's place in it, and his place in this country. And every time I pick up a newspaper or watch television, I wonder if he will make it to his teens without witnessing global warfare.

Friends without children are sympathetic and listen. Friends with kids — like my buddy Tony, a father for almost two decades—advise; "Don't sweat the philosophical stuff. That comes later. First, worry about keeping enough Pampers."

Tony, with two well-adjusted teens, is right. I won't rush Christopher's childhood. I know diapers come before discipline, comic books before Shakespeare, and a sixty-second attention span before TV's "60 Minutes." But the philosophical stuff is important because how I act and react to situations will influence Christopher's response and learning.

My concerns are not unique. But as a black parent I know the social, political, and economic forces black children (especially boys) must face. I know society's pecking order—white men, white women, black women, black men—will force him to work longer and harder. I know it's not fair but I'll have to teach him to ignore that and go for the gold. I know these things because I've experienced them professionally and socially.

Father's Day reemphasizes duty. If you take parenting seriously, it can be overwhelming: arranging for sitters, sticking to a revised household budget, sharing my wife, and revamping plans to accommodate dining and traveling with baby.

It seems like so much, but then Christopher flashes a million-dollar smile and I fall in love with him again. I look into his bright eyes and I'm amazed by all I have to teach him so he'll have a happy and rewarding life. Without molding him in my image, I know I want to see certain qualities emerge because I know he'll need them.

I want him to be strong, tough, and aggressive when necessary. But I also want him to practice compassion and sensitivity. I want him to be bold, make decisions, and take chances, knowing it's okay to make mistakes and admit when he is wrong.

I want him to understand macho is passe because it won't make him a "man" or a better person. I want him to know it's all right to cry, to be silly, to enjoy receiving (as well as giving) flowers, to appreciate his African-American heritage, and know that love doesn't conquer all but it helps.

Michael A. Tucker and son, Christopher

I want him to know his family is there for him; that we love him. Love instills dignity, a characteristic missing in too many kids. Maybe if it gets passed around it can solve some of the problems that plague neighborhoods and schools.

I learned optimism from family and friends who continually dish out hugs and kisses to their kids, believing love is the best defense against the anxiety and hopelessness of their peers. I started paying attention to parent-child interaction during Geri's pregnancy. I've witnessed touching moments: a joyful ride on daddy's bike, running and tumbling in the grass, a kid's excitement as he orders his own meal at a restaurant.

Then there's parental behavior that unnerves you: dragging a kid along like a sack while she tries to steady herself, hard spanks for minor misbehavior, cursing at toddlers, or ignoring a legitimate cry for help. Not exactly child abuse, but I hope these parents get to meet someone like my Dad or Tony before it turns to that.

Gemini — Thinking about a career change?

By Cosima

SPOTLIGHT ON GEMINI
May 22 - June 21

Gemini, both sides of your personality can be charming when you wish. You are quick-witted, creative and so articulate you are sometimes accused of being glib. Your birth month has you in high spirits even though some of last month's unpleasantness may still linger. Your natural instinct for self-preservation is beginning to pay off. You can ease up a bit now; especially at work where your tendency to move and act fast has caused some problems. If you are still mulling a career change, it may not be too late for a job related to show business.

CANCER
June 22 - July 23

Relax and stop being so crabby! Those money problems won't kill you and they might even teach you a lesson or two about living by your wits instead of planning. Count on your insight and natural affection to help you deal with romantic problems. Remember, possessiveness hasn't helped you much in the past and it won't in the future.

LEO
July 24 - August 23

Oh! you Leos. You are so full of stuff! Eyes flashing, smile big as day but Cosima knows that even you have some down moments. Most important is for you to know it and not let them stop you from growing into the powerful, generous, friendly leader you were born to be. June's bounty should give way to serious planning. You love hard work once you get started.

VIRGO
August 24 - September 23

Maybe Cosima should be the one to tell you that you can drive those of us who love you nuts with your crankiness and nit-picking but then we remember what a good friend and good family member you are. After all, who else will remind us to call dad and wish him a happy Father's Day?

LIBRA
September 24 - October 23

If you didn't get that extra money, don't brood about it. It won't make that much difference even though you're having some problems at work. Your forgetfulness and lateness may have something to do with someone you work with. Get it straightened out, fast.

SCORPIO
October 24 - November 22

You must get your love life in hand before you go up in flames. Your power and magnetism create as many problems as pleasures. Remember, temper tantrums are never attractive. Try to be worthy of the attention you so easily get. Don't take your prosperity for granted, but stop worrying about losing everything. You won't.

SAGITTARIUS
November 23 - December 21

Don't despair if your work situation depressed you last month. Your sense of commitment will see you through and your natural curiosity hasn't died; it's just on vacation while you cope with over-work and under-appreciation. What a cheerful lover you can be! But you've got to stop looking for something better than you have or it could be a long and lonely fall.

CAPRICORN
December 22 - January 20

Something can be done about the sadness you feel, but it may mean a real commitment to professional help. You are dependable and caring. Don't be concerned if some people think those qualities are boring. There is someone out there for you.

AQUARIUS
January 21 - February 19

Go ahead and sing. Cosima knows you want to. It may surprise those who think of you are more controlled than you really are. Some Motown in the backyard on a warm night could change your life . . . or at least your summer. After all, Leontyne Price is an Aquarian.

PISCES
February 20 - March 20

Don't confuse your exhaustion from all your running about with the frustration you feel from spending so much time with someone who doesn't understand your strength of will and spirituality. Stop trying to convince non-believers. Don't be too disappointed with your lover. You expected more than most of us can give.

ARIES
March 21 - April 20

As the first sign of the zodiac you never mind being first at anything. That's why you hate to stand in line. Your natural elegance and love of plants and flowers help you create an environment the rest of us envy. Now that you have a little extra money and are happier with your situation at work you can get back to your love life. They don't call you the ram for nothing.

TAURUS
April 21 - May 21

Poor Taurus! People think you are hard-headed and want everything your way when all you want to do is get the job done; whether it's that shed in the backyard or making the piles of money that often come your way. Now that you've made the commitment to that new diet you can window shop again and by late June it may be safe to hit the sale racks.