

Reconciliation With Your Father (or your children) The Why, Benefits, and Excuses

You may ask “Why would I want to do something that seems either not necessary or even the last thing I would want to do?” Well, let me tell you.

A. The Why

Everywhere we turn, everywhere we look (TV, movies, books, at home, work, and church), we see situations of difficulty, conflict, and hurt between fathers and children, including and especially when those children become adults - and then pass the pain and hurt on to their children for generations.

It would be appropriate to address reconciliation to adult children of absent fathers - you - because

You can stop the cycle.

and

It is never too late to understand and bring healing to the father-wound.

Why does it matter that we even talk about reconciliation with our fathers when we have learned to do life on our own and we'd just as soon let sleeping dogs lie? Well, here is an amazing statement that we have learned whether we are 8, 18, 45, or 75 and dad is long gone, and it is this:

Your future success in life - at any age - is based on your relationship with your father.

Reconciliation is not about blaming or accusing but for understanding and healing. When you look at the negative behaviors of people at work, for example, you can observe defensiveness, blaming and accusing, creating rivalries, avoiding conflict, ignoring problem behaviors, feeling left out, not listened to, outbursts of anger, hatred of men (misandry) or of women (misogyny), distrust of people, religion or authority, racism, road rage, domestic abuse, passivity, and so on. Surprisingly, these behaviors have their roots in our relationships (or lack thereof) with dad in those formative 18 years of his time to prepare us to fly from the nest to meet the world on our own.

Reconciliation has the potential of changing that behavior in all areas of your life today and in the lives of your children tomorrow!

There are 4 principle points that a father is designed to prepare in his children through regular involvement in their lives, each one based on the father's values, character, and wisdom:

Reconciliation has been proven to allow the four principles of self-esteem, confidence, maturity, and identity to be renewed to an amazing extent at any age.

Are these reasons enough? Can they help overcome the fears and excuses of not moving towards reconciliation?

Your response to “The Why”

- Your life is not just a series of events like jobs on a resume. It is jam-packed full of characters, themes that are consistent about your personality, hard times that got resolved, and joyful times that were too short-lived. Other people may not agree with your version of your experience but then it is your experience, not theirs. It has all been true because you lived it and saw it from your perspective. The goal is to start seeing it as having meaning and purpose for you, for who you are and for who you were made to be.

One of the best ways to begin is by examining what it was like when you were growing up with your father. Describe the following as you consider them at different ages such as at 7, 10, 15, 18.

- What was he like?
- What were you like?
- How did you act towards each other?
- What did you have fun doing?
- What do you wish you could have done more of together?
- What were your fears and disappointments?
- What are five ways you are like your father?
- What are five ways you are different from your father?
- Does your relationship have a sense of freedom and being your own person or a feeling of being stuck? Describe it.

You might journal this so you have a record. At least tell someone if it's easier to just talk. Revisiting this story of your life might be painful, interesting or even revealing. It's an important step so I hope you commit to doing it. Set aside some time and get into it. Feel free to come back to your story and add to it.

Note: Most efforts at reconciliation happen with adult children reaching out to their fathers. It is more difficult for fathers to face the shame and shortcomings of their relationships and approach their children. However, if it is the father reaching out, the whole process usually becomes easier. These pages refer to it happening either way.

B. The Benefits

First of all, the need to reconcile applies to everyone, not just to those who are estranged. To some degree, everyone has said and done things that have wounded and have been wounded themselves. Forgiveness is needed - it helps even in a great, loving relationship, it matters.

When each of my 3 kids turned about the age of 20, I met with them individually in a public setting. What I said was, “I believe we have had a great family life together as you have grown up. I am so proud of you and love you so much. At the same time, I know I have said and done things over the years that have hurt you.” (At this point I could see their “mind’s eye” searching for and remembering those various times.) “I want you to know that I would never hurt you on purpose, in fact, would rarely have even known that I hurt you. It’s been a part of my journey to learn how to be a father and a husband, friend, mentor, teacher, and so on. I was so ignorant. What I want to know is will you forgive me for those hurts and wounds?” To my relief and joy, each one said yes, they will. Now, before telling you about the rest of our meeting time, it brings us to the first of the benefits.

1. The amazing thing about forgiveness is that once it is given genuinely, **the transgression immediately loses all of its power**. My kids knew they could not go back and hold those things against me. That doesn’t mean those events won’t still have some consequences. That doesn’t mean I can behave as if I never learned from my errors. It means we have brought the wrong into the light, confessed it and brought healing to the wound. Therefore, those I offended and wounded will no longer blame or accuse me of what has been forgiven.
2. In addition, **forgiving releases us from the prison of unforgiveness**. A quote from author Lewis Smedes says “To forgive is to set the prisoner free, and then discover the prisoner was me.” (from [Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve](#)). So many people prefer to hold grudges as if that hurts the other person when in fact, the one holding the grudge is the one who is in prison.
3. **Next**, I see this conversation with my now adult children as a time of teaching and modeling for them. They would likely be parents in the not-too-distant future. The lesson modeled here is “**How we deal with the hurt and wounds of our own father’s failures determines our ability to be good fathers or mothers to our children.**” That’s called building a good legacy.
4. In that vein of thinking, author Richard Rohr makes this statement: “If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it.” In our work at halfway houses we often hear the comment “My grandpa was like this, my dad was, I am, and now my kids are just the same. These are the cards life dealt us and it is what it is.” We tell them that way of thinking is a lie and they can change. They can **transform what they don’t like instead of simply passing it on to the next generation** - and this is a generational problem.
5. Having had this conversation with my kids, it opened the potential of **the renewed and healed relationship we always hoped for** but perhaps never thought was possible. All kids want their dad to be their hero and their friend. When he’s not, they never lose hope until they realize it’s not going to happen. However, through reconciliation, the hero can be restored - flawed, but restored. Family life was intended to be this way; openly enjoying each other, offending but forgiving, disappointing but renewing, knowing that forgiveness and healing are available before they are even asked for - or deserved.

My next statement to my kids was rather shocking upon first hearing it. I said, “from now on I am no longer your parent and you are no longer my child.” What!! I went on, “I only want to see your relationship with mom and me as your mother and father, not your parents, and you as our

sons or daughter (We had two boys and one girl).” That might sound like mincing words but I think you get the message. It intimates treating each other as having a relationship rather than a hierarchy of control. I believe behaving with this understanding right from birth would make a significant impact on family relationships. It is an attitude shift. In terms of benefits, this one never ceases to amaze me.

6. Having a father/son or daughter relationship rather than parent/child tends to **build self-esteem, confidence, maturity, and identity while it encourages and redeems the father in his role**, all of which are the very elements he was to teach and model in the first place.

My final statement to my kids at these one-to-one meetings was this: “My dream is that as adult children, I could have a relationship with you on-going, not only as good friends but to have the privilege of speaking into your lives. This does not mean that you would have to do what I say, but that you would listen and discuss and put what I say into your ‘hopper of thinking.’ Then you decide what you will do. And know this, whatever you decide, I will support you even if I don’t agree with you because I trust you, I believe in you. You can have confidence that no matter what you say or do, it will never lessen how much I love you.”

7. That kind of reconciliation whether your kids are young, 20, or seasoned adults, opens us to a benefit that **introduces possibly unheard words to the relationship** such as “You are my daughter/son” which means “you belong to me, you are accepted (this is the essence of knowing one’s identity).” “I love you,” which counters abandonment. “I am very proud of you” which speaks to self-worth and value and says “I choose you, you are mine.” The daughter/son may also respond by saying “I am so glad you are my dad.” I often ask clients what words they would like to hear from their fathers that they never heard. The most common response is, “I love you.” Reconciliation can make this possible.

You might wonder how things have gone between my adult children (who are now parents and grandparents themselves) and their mother and me over the years since those conversations. They have not been without challenges and struggles, but because of the reconciled relationships, I am happy to say my dream is mostly reality. They have come to me about their jobs, their parenting, their doubts and fears, even their marriages. I have also brought my concerns to them for their wisdom and insights. I have said that our relationships have a generational impact. We are so blessed to see our kids passing these practices and principles on to the next generations.

My story may seem like a fairytale to many of you, something that is beyond reality for you. My encouragement is to just take the first step of reconciliation. They are all listed in Part III of my book and I will be adding more helps on my website over time. Keep these seven benefits in mind, maybe post them as reminders so the struggle doesn’t defeat you before you get there. Here they are again in brief...

The Benefits of Reconciliation - A Summary

1. Once forgiveness is given, the transgression loses its power over you.
2. Forgiving releases us from the prison of unforgiveness.

3. How we deal with the hurt and wounds of our own father's failures determines our ability to be good parents to our children.
4. We can transform what we don't like about our relationships instead of simply passing the bad onto the next generation
5. Having the potential of a renewed and healed relationship we always hoped for.
6. Build self-esteem, self-confidence, maturity, and identity while encouraging and redeeming the father in his role.
7. It introduces possibly unheard positive healing words to the relationship.

Your response to "The Benefits:"

- Pick one of the seven benefits and explain it in your own words.
- What words have you never or rarely heard from your father that you would love to hear?
- If you could wave a magic wand, what personality or character traits do you see in yourself or your family that you would like to change?
- What might be a first step in moving toward that change?

C. The Excuses

Have you ever made a resolution that you didn't complete? Of course, we all have. There are three reasons for this: 1) We don't really **commit** to the idea in the first place 2) We don't make **a specific plan**, and 3) We don't have **accountability** to follow through with the plan and use all the excuses in the book not to. Typically, all three of these reasons have their roots in fear: fear of change, the unknown, or of actually having to take action towards what we don't really want to do.

For Reconciliation, the **plan** is in my book, Part III. For **accountability**, find a friend, counselor, neighbor, someone you trust that you can report to. You can give them the details or simply say "I am going to take a step in a plan by next Friday. You don't have to know what it is, just that on Friday I want you to ask me how it went. Is that okay?"

The **excuses and lack of commitment** are the big hassle, the roadblocks keeping us from even getting started. Here are words that you will likely recognize either from your own mouth or from others around you. "I don't have time, I'm too busy." "He's too far away." "He's dead." "He's too angry." "He doesn't deserve it." "It's too late and won't make any difference." "He won't change." "I hate him and can't bring myself to do it." "I'm so wounded I can't face him." "What? Ask for forgiveness? Admit I was wrong?" "I don't want to hurt him." "He doesn't want to talk about the past."

Do any of these ring a bell for you? I want to give three responses.

1. **"It's too late, he's dead, or he's so far out of my life I don't even know where he is."**
 - a. If that's the case, go through the process anyway as if he is there. You might say reconciliation takes two people. Well, there are two of you in your mind and heart and

that is enough for you to process your feelings. It may even be easier this way. He's just not there at this time.

b. Write a letter to him to express yourself. In our program, we call it the **Dear Dad letter**. This is not a time to blame or accuse, just to state the facts about what happened and how it affected you. He may not agree but that's his viewpoint, and this is about yours. This may take a few versions to get it written in a way that will help bring healing and reconciliation instead of creating more hate, blame, and justification. The Dear Dad letter helps to get your thoughts and feelings together and to practice saying them.

c. Read it to him at his gravesite, or keep it in a journal for rereading, or burn it to put it in the past. The benefit of addressing it like this is for you and your healing, not him since he is gone.

2. **“He doesn't deserve it and will never change.”**

Forgiveness isn't about him, it's about you. And don't decide for him how he will respond. If he doesn't, that's unfortunate but it is his problem and you will still benefit. If he does, that's to the benefit of both of you. It still helps to write the Dear Dad letter first to get your words in order without saying inappropriate emotional reactions. Remember, it's not about blaming or accusing, it's about forgiving.

3. **“I can't do it yet.”**

It's okay and necessary to allow time for healing. The seriousness of the offense will determine how long it will take, just don't use it as an excuse to put it off forever. Be intentional about the delay. Some say time heals all wounds so they let it go. What that does is let them lie dormant while they fester and prevent all the benefits from ever happening. The relationship never becomes what could be.

The last thing I want to say about the excuses is that they are all lies. Because of our nature, they keep us from doing what we know is right. This is a big deal. Don't let the excuses sound like truth in your ears.

Your response to “The Excuses:”

- Since everyone needs to reconcile to some extent, what excuses have you heard yourself giving at times to avoid having to talk about it?
- Which of my responses above resonates with you?
- Think about the potential of having a reconciliation story with a positive outcome. What might be an appropriate first step for you to take?
- Knowing yourself, what will get in the way and how might you handle the obstacles?

I encourage you to return to my book, *The Legacy of Absence*, and follow the steps to reconciliation as outlined there. You might find a friend or a sibling to talk with about this journey and hold each other accountable for taking those steps.

This is so important and valuable that I want you to know that I am thinking about you and praying and hoping that you are able to follow through and experience the Benefits of Reconciliation.

What will your legacy be?

Blessings,
Tim Olson

Please return to my website on occasion as new material, research updates, exercises and stories will be added to the library. And feel free to respond by email or website about your experiences, comments, and questions. I will answer as I am able. Finally, your reviews and ratings on Amazon will be highly appreciated. They are the lifeblood for any author. Thank you.

www.TimOlsonAuthor.com

“This is not the end of the road: it’s the trailhead. What you are moving towards is freedom, healing, and authenticity.” - John Eldredge