

## **FAMILY MATTERS 4**

### **“The Father’s Role”**

*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way that you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.*

Eph. 6:4

As we continue this series dealing with family matters, we’ve come today to discuss some of the Roles contained in each family. As I considered each part of the primary family (male & female parent, and the child) I have decided to focus this week on the role of a father, next week on the role of a mother, and the following on the role of children. I will save for discussion at a later date the roles of husband and wife. Today, I want to talk to us dads about being and becoming Godly fathers. You moms (and kids), and grandma’s and grandpa’s can listen in too, it won’t hurt you.

I believe the best advice I might give to us father’s here today is “don’t do it alone.” Some of us grew up with great father models; some with no father at all. Some grew up with dysfunctional, or alcoholic, or negligent, or absent, or preoccupied fathers. Some with just good dads. No matter your background, experience, or observation of good or bad dads; being a Godly Father is essentially a matter of not doing it alone.

Obviously, no one becomes a father without a mother. So first and foremost, dads, where it is appropriate, learn to lean on your children’s mother for strength, support, encouragement, and maybe even advice. Secondly, if you had a good father, don’t be afraid to ask him for help, advice, suggestions, prayer or whatever else you need. That’s about as far as any of us usually go, but there are more resources. I know most of us dad’s don’t want to admit that we don’t know something, or that we might need help with this or that issue; but most of us have friends who are dads, and they might be helpful. Most of us know older gentlemen who have been fathers; who’d probably relish the opportunity to help explore your parenting issues.

And hopefully you'll know that though I can hardly claim to be any kind of father/expert...I'm willing to assist any of you with your parenting challenges.

All that being said might be enough...but there is more. Whether you had a dad or not; a good dad or bad; we all have a Heavenly Father, who is the perfect parent; who is the best example for raising kids (especially wayward ones); who is the gentle giant when it comes to all things relational...including the relationships between fathers and children. So don't be afraid to seek God's guidance in your quest to be a good dad. As we study some more ideas for becoming Godly fathers; keep in mind that most of these characteristics are observations about God, as well as about good dads.

### **1. A GODLY FATHER LOVES HIS CHILDREN UNCONDITIONALLY**

*...for the Lord corrects those He loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights...Proverbs 3:12*

Unconditional love is the primary relationship ingredient we receive from God; and ought to be the underlying foundation of all relationships between fathers and children. It is a hard thing in this society and culture where love is earned and lost depending on so many external circumstances. "I'll be really proud of you if you get all A's". "You'll make me so happy if you make the varsity squad". "Yea, second chair is ok, but wouldn't you just love being first chair trumpet?" We are surrounded by an underlying 'works righteousness' environment, that makes anything to be valued; something to be earned!

The grace of God; and the Love of God are unconditional. They cannot be earned...and therefore cannot be lost! Same ought to be true of a father's love for a child. That is not to say that a father's love is something to be abused, misused, or taken for granted. Children can sometimes manipulate their father's into making poor decisions, by appealing to this misunderstood form of 'love': "Dad, if you really loved me, you'd let me stay out with my boyfriend till 1am." A loving father soon learns not to play that game, and ought to respond:

“It’s exactly because I do love you that I won’t let you stay out till 1am with...that tattooed, nose-ringed, shaved headed knucklehead.” Ok, maybe leave off that last part!

Our children need to see that our love is unconditioned by their behavior, their attitude, their neglect. There are other ways and means to deal with inappropriate behavior, attitudes and neglect; but it must never be by withholding or compromising, or wavering with our unconditional love.

## **2. A GODLY FATHER LOVES TO PROVIDE FOR AND PROTECT HIS CHILDREN**

In a sense it has been fused into the DNA of all men to be provider/protectors. We are largely defined by the role of provider/protector as men, husbands, and fathers. God again is the model, providing all our needs, protecting us from all kinds of dangers, toils and snares. A father who loves his children, will work to provide for their daily, essential, necessary needs...and probably a few frivolous wants along the way too!

There is nothing wrong with a few unnecessary things along the way; but too many dads abandon many of their other “role’s” to entirely focus on this one; and when they do trouble usually ensues. Too many dads have sacrificed their wives and children on the altar’s they make of their careers. The ego strokes and power positions of important jobs can be tempting alternatives to being good dads. Many dads have wrongly assumed that all it takes to be a good dad is to be a good provider; and often too late discover this devious lie. I know very few children who prefer ‘more toys’ over ‘more time’ with dad. Know what I mean?

I also believe that providing and protecting involves setting appropriate boundaries for and with our children. Boundaries appear as fences or restrictions to kids and teens testing their budding wings; but they are necessary to maintaining some sort of order, and they are essential to raising wholesome and healthy children. Loving dads set boundaries, and equitably enforce them.

I remember when Adam was first learning to ride his bike without training wheels. I was working in the garage of our home in RC. We had a long drive way. Adam would start out from the garage, down the drive-way, up the side-walk a ways...then turn and return to the garage to do it all over again, a little further each time. He didn't want to go too far and get lost. When I realized what he was doing, I got on my bike and rode with him to the street 1 block west of our house, one block north, 2 blocks east, and 1 block south. At each I pointed out the street signs, landmarks, and dangerous crossings. We went home, and I told Adam he could ride his bike anywhere he wanted within those 4 streets. Guess what he did? Took off and was gone for 30 minutes, Susan was freaking out. When he later returned, I asked where he'd been. He said, "I was riding around the edge." The boundary had not restricted or limited him, it had set him free. So too with us and God, and with us and our children. We are set in boundaries to make us free. It's part of providing and protecting.

### **3. A GODLY FATHER LIVES OUT THE FAMILY VALUES BY HIS EXAMPLE**

*...don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example...I Peter 5:3*

This is a two-part point. One of the father's primary jobs is to pass on the values, especially the spiritual ones, to his children. Not that mom's have no part in this, they do; but it is one of dad's most important jobs. We've studied the 78<sup>th</sup> Psalm as part of our church's mission understanding; to pass on the faith to each succeeding generation. But it is not solely the church's job; it belongs to the parents, especially dads, to pass on their faith, values, and behavioral morals to their children.

I've been seated across the table with a family who didn't believe this, and disregarded their responsibility. Their son was a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, and wanted to be part of our youth group. His parents made it clear that they had never tried to influence any of their children to practice their religion, or any religion at all. We lost that kid, and I don't know where he is today.

I know some parents think it's wrong to influence or pressure their children into any spiritual or religious value; but I personally believe that approach is wrong. Would those same parents apply that parenting philosophy when it came to the use of drugs or alcohol or pornography? "We'll let them decide for themselves!" Oh really!

Obviously as children become teens and leave home, they have to make those kinds of decisions for themselves; but when they are young, and at other points throughout their lives; it is still our responsibility (as dads) to show them, teach them and model for them the values you and your family treasure.

The second focus of this point is that the best way to show, teach, and model values, morals, and family priorities is by being an example. One of the first "rules" kids dislike is the one that says: "Do what I say, not what I do." Oh really! How is that working out for you? If we want kids to grow up to be self-actualized and healthy in mind body and spirit; we must consistently live before them the values we claim to define us. If we want our kids to grow up good; (and remember, there are no guarantees) the best chance we have is by humbly living to the best of our ability, according to the values and morals, and spiritual priorities we have inherited from our parents or developed for ourselves.

#### **4. A GODLY FATHER LOVES TO PLAY WITH HIS CHILDREN**

I know that probably sounds anti-climatic and grossly unspiritual when compared to the others; but I still think it's important. Dads' playing with their little girls helps foster a healthier sense of womanhood in her. Dad's appropriately loving their children's mother also helps in that regard. Dads and sons have always played together, and should continue to do so throughout their lives. I don't know why it's so important, I just know it is. It's not important what you play, and especially not important who wins the games; it's just important that you play. When your kids are little, let them win, it won't spoil them or make them weak, it will encourage them, and make them happy.

As your kids mature, they'll play games without you, and your role will become cheerleader and positive vocal supporter. If you want to coach your kids, volunteer for the job, be trained to do so, and enjoy the opportunity. Don't try to relive your glory years through your sons or daughters. Don't try to realize any unfulfilled goals from your athletic career by pushing your kids to do stuff they don't want to do. As one family expert once said; the parent's primary job is to find something that their kids can excel at, and try to provide every opportunity to allow them to do that. That doesn't mean they have to do it all, just choose, together, something then enable them to excel.

Being a dad (or mom) isn't for wimps. Never was, never will be; but it's getting harder these days I think. I spent much time this week looking and thinking about examples of TV and Movie dads who might inspire us with their technique's or examples. Who could forget Dr. Huxtable sitting down with Theo and explaining why not going to college...was not an option? Or Will Smith and his son in their Pursuit of Happyness? Or how about Andy Griffith and his wise ways of teaching young Opie how to be a responsible young man. There are ample examples on the other side, still teaching too: Darth and his son Luke, Homer Simpson and his kids, and the Family Guy come easily to mind.

What I settled on to close this message instead is a real life dad, with a real life family and one special son. Here is their story.

video

Dad's; together has power, don't run alone. God wants you to be a successful, loving and Godly father, He'll help you...because Family Matters.

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