

Spiritual Fathering Session 1: A Biblical Basis for Responsibilities in the Home

Much of this information comes from a family worship website by Kerry Ptacek

This is NOT group therapy to help with deep family problems. If you need family counseling, you may want to contact John Lane.

We live in a day where many Christians are seeking revival. I submit that what we need is what I would call “responsible discipleship.” This was common in the early 1700’s. Many American Christians at the time could read the Bible in Greek, Hebrew, Latin and Aramaic. They spent much time studying the Word of God. That generation was the one that experienced the First Great Awakening. Perhaps if we stopped chasing revival (a short-term experience) and started pursuing responsible discipleship, we would wind up with both, but it is not easy. Responsible discipleship involves stretching ourselves, “fathering” ourselves.

Jesus told a parable in Luke 18:10-14. Two men walked into the temple. One congratulated himself (self-nurture, self-mothering), the other stretched himself (self-challenge, self-fathering). The parable ends with this verse:

"I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:14)

Notice that only one of the two who walked into the temple was called a man by Jesus at the end of the parable. The use of the “divine passive” (“be humbled,” “be exalted”) tells us that it is God who is pushing down on a man who mothers himself and it is God who is exalting a man who fathers himself.

By engaging in this study, you are saying that you know that are not all that you need to be. You are not wanting to nurture/mother yourself anymore. You are wanting to stretch/father yourself.

What we will cover: Material I wrote on giving spiritual leadership at home, largely based on Deut 6:6-9

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ⁴ "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; ⁷ and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. ⁸ "And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹ "And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

(1) Based on this passage, there are five applications:

Put it on your heart (we must study the Bible ourselves first)

Teach intentionally (have a structured, intentional time of instruction) because:

It says first to teach them *diligently*

It will be a reference point for the incidental teaching

There is so little teaching in the church today (little structured discipleship)

Teach incidentally (“talk of them”), meaning that you refer to your intentional teaching in casual situations

Take it with you (today), that would mean something like carrying an ipod with the Bible on it)

Put it up (put Scriptures up where everyone can see them around the house)

(2) How to pray for your family, especially when it comes to generational sin

(3) Book on marriage

Materials needed: Pencil/pen when you come.

To those of you whose children are already grown: God has a lot to say to grandfathers, as well

Remember: This is going to cost you some time—maybe an hour a day. If you are looking for a place to find time in your schedule, decide which TV program you will not watch.

One more note: You will need to ask your wife to plan to come on week 4 (July 28). It will be more than worth your time.

Introduction

According to church pollster George Barna, only 22% of people ages 25-29 attended church in the past week. Most of them never intend to go again. This means that, if your family is an average Christian family, and you have two children, the chances are that both of them will never attend church once they leave home. The answer to this dilemma is *not* to adjust what we are doing in church.

What, then, is the answer?

Family Worship in the Old Testament

Reminder: Old Testament worship involved the entire family. Witness: "But you shall eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God will choose, **you and your son and daughter, and your male and female servants**, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all your undertakings. (Deuteronomy 12:18-19, NASU)

Joshua rehearsed God's covenant with Israel with entire families present. Witness: "There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel with **the women and the little ones and the strangers** who were living among them. (Joshua 8:35, NASU)

Jehoshaphat's urgent prayer for help against the enemies of Judah was offered up while entire families were present. Witness: "All Judah was standing before the LORD, **with their infants, their wives and their children.**" (2 Chronicles 20:13, NASU)

Nehemiah led the dedication of the newly rebuilt wall with entire families rejoicing together. Witness: "...and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, **even the women and children rejoiced**, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar." (Nehemiah 12:43, NASU)

Family Worship in the New Testament

Family worship in the New Testament can be found in Acts 2:46: "Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart..." (NASU) the phrase "from house to house" is better translated "**in each one's house.**" It is best translated in a distributive sense, rather than a progressive sense.

The Priority of Family Worship

Note that, in Moses' last address to the children of Israel, he reiterates the responsibility that fathers have to their children: "Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, **which you shall command your sons** to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. 47 "For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess." (Deuteronomy 32:46-47, NASU) Here, God is stressing that His commandments are not merely a trifling thing. It is literally a matter of life and death for our children. If they learn His laws and obey them, they will live. If they do not learn them, or if they disregard them, they will be dead, even while they live. They will be failures, even amidst the short-lived trappings of external success. (randall) To put it in a more positive way, when we teach the Word at home, it is not idle. It will begin to *actively* work in their lives, as well as in ours.

Male Headship is God's Plan

^{NAS} **Ephesians 6:1** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), ³ that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. ⁴ And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:4 is addressed to fathers specifically. In verse one, the Greek word for parents is given ("goneusin"). In verse two, the Greek words "pater" and "mater" are mentioned for fathers and mothers respectively. If, in verse 4, if Paul had wanted to use the word for parents, he would have used the same word he had just used in verse 1. If he had wanted to address mothers alone, or mothers along with fathers, he could have inserted "mater." Instead, he addressed fathers *only* and fathers *emphatically*. This word is in the vocative case, which is a form of specific address. It means that Paul is singling the addressees out from the masses. In essence, he is saying, "You there, fathers, yeah, I'm talking to *you*, and to no one else." This is consistent with Jewish practice. The Talmud (rabbinic commentary on the Old Testament) states that the *father* is "bound to teach his son." Jewish instruction of children was very different from that of the Gentiles. Gentile children were usually instructed by women or by slaves. (Ptacek, pp. 36-7)

The Consequences of Male Passivity

Case 1: Adam

The most common example of male passivity, and its consequences, are found in Genesis 3:6: "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate." (NASU)

Question: What should Adam have done? *Answer: Corrected the error as it was spoken.*

Question: How can we apply this today? *Answer: When some untruth comes from the media, or from friends, or any other source, correct it immediately.*

Note: It will help your wife if you will talk with her and tell her that you are going to take a more active role in being the spiritual gatekeeper for the family, that you are going to correct lies that enter the home, because you do are responsible before God to do that, just like Adam was, even though he failed.

Case 2: Eli

1 Samuel 2:22-30 ²² Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. ²³ And he said to them, "Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people?" ²⁴ "No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the LORD's people circulating. ²⁵ "If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?" But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death. ²⁶ Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the LORD and with men. ²⁷ Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Did I *not* indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt *in bondage* to Pharaoh's house?' ²⁸ 'And did I *not* choose them from all the tribes of Israel to be My priests, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, to carry an ephod before Me; and did I *not* give to the house of your father all the fire *offerings* of the sons of Israel?' ²⁹ 'Why do you kick at My sacrifice and at My offering which I have commanded *in My dwelling*, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?' ³⁰ "Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever'; but now the LORD declares, 'Far be it from Me-- for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed."

Eli is the personification of the truth that it is not enough to be a good man. He evidently was a good man, but he did not train his sons as the scripture commands. As a result, he suffered, his family suffered and the entire nation suffered. In the end, Eli died, his sons died and one of his daughters-in-law died. Eli was rebuked for his failure. Notice that, when God rebuked Eli, He described Eli as "honoring your sons above Me." (1 Samuel 2:29) When we fail to restrain our rebellious and dishonoring children, we participate in that dishonor, showing more honor to our disobedient children than to God. Note also that, in 1 Samuel 3:13, Samuel *does* speak to them, but their conduct had been so outrageous as to merit removal. When we fail to take drastic action in response to blatant rebellion, we dishonor God. (randall)

Lesson: We must not only share the truth with our children, but *give consequences* if truth is not followed.

Case 3: Hezekiah

Isaiah 39:6 - 8 ⁶ Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD. ⁷ 'And some of your sons who shall issue from you, whom you shall beget, shall be taken away; and they shall become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.'" ⁸ Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good." For he thought, "For there will be peace and truth in my days."

Note, in Isaiah 39:6-8, Hezekiah's complete indifference to his son's generation. His self-centeredness is likely the undoing of his son. Hezekiah was a great king, indeed, there was no king like him before or after him in all Judah (2 Kings 18:5). Contrast that with Manasseh. Manasseh was so wicked that the scripture does not even use the other kings of Judah as a measuring stick. The scriptural record says that he "seduced [Judah] to do evil more than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel." (2 Kings 21:9, NASU) Not only was he evil himself, he led the entire nation to be more wicked than the nations that God had destroyed before Israel. A stronger portrayal of wickedness cannot be imagined. What a difference one self-absorbed father can make between one generation and another! (randall)

Question: What should Hezekiah have done? *Answer: Beg God to have mercy on his son, and on his generation.*

Question: How does this apply today? *Answer: By not getting so involved in career, etc. that we are unaware of the spiritual danger our children may be in.*

Case 4: The Men of Jeremiah's Day

Notice the sorry state of Judah just before the captivity, especially in regard to the lack of male spiritual leadership, recorded in Jeremiah 44:15-19:

“Then all the men who were aware that their wives were burning sacrifices to other gods, along with all the women who were standing by, as a large assembly, including all the people who were living in Pathros in the land of Egypt, responded to Jeremiah, saying, 16 ‘As for the message that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we are not going to listen to you! 17 But rather we will certainly carry out every word that has proceeded from our mouths, by burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, just as we ourselves, our forefathers, our kings and our princes did in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then we had plenty of food and were well off and saw no misfortune. 18 But since we stopped burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have met our end by the sword and by famine.’ 19 ‘And,’ said the women, ‘when we were burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and were pouring out drink offerings to her, was it without our husbands that we made for her sacrificial cakes in her image and poured out drink offerings to her?’ (NASU)

Before commenting on this, let us rehearse the evolution of Baal worship. Baal worship began as the worship of El, which was the worship of the true God, albeit with limited revelation apart from the way God revealed Himself to Abraham. Melchizedek appears to have been a worshiper of El. Soon, however, the pagans began to teach that El had a wife, Asherah. Soon, they taught, El and Asherah had children. Baal was among them. As time went on, Baal began to move to the forefront, and El faded into the background. Eventually, Baal married Asherah and became the supreme god, himself. Although this is the basic pattern, pagan worship evolved in different ways during the history of Israel. At times, female deities were exalted to the highest place, as is the case when the women of Judah were rebuked for offering sacrifices to the “Queen of Heaven” in Jeremiah 44:15-19. In that passage, in verse 19, note the passivity of the men to their wives’ idolatrous behavior. All manner of immorality accompanied idol worship: homosexuality, prostitution (a role common among the priestesses), and child sacrifice were all common. This is one of the most tragic aspects of pagan worship: it warped the biblical view of the family, where God portrays Himself as a father, and His people are called His children. (Ptacek, p. 20)

To redefine the family is to meddle with the very essence of God Himself, who has chosen to reveal Himself in terms of the family. To redefine God is to alter family and gender roles and to change the moral structure of society. He who trifles with one effaces the other. (randall)

Question: What should the men have done? *Answer: Lead their families to worship the Lord alone. The answer is in doing the right thing, not just in avoiding doing the wrong thing.*