

Success As A Father

The Biblical Blueprint for Christian Fatherhood

Those of you who know me know that I'm not a crier, but when men are gathered together to do something like that, I can barely make it through. Not crying, mind you. Just choke up a little bit. Amen. I am very much looking forward to this man's advance. I think it is. God has been wonderfully answering prayers of late, and I'm looking forward to the prayers that he'll answer at that time. Please make your way to 1 Thessalonians chapter 2.

There's a difference between preaching a sermon and teaching a Bible lesson. I'm not sure anybody on television knows what the difference is anymore, but teaching's goal is to inform, while the goal of sermonizing is to persuade and provoke a decision. When teaching a Bible lesson, one opens the word of God and begins instructing. When delivering a sermon, the three-part goal is to tell your audience what you're going to tell them, and then tell them, and then tell them what you told them. That is done in order to bring your audience from where they are mentally, emotionally, and spiritually as they await your sermon, to the actual sermon, to then deliver the actual sermon, and to finally deliver your audience from the sermon to where they depart to go to their next destination, hopefully challenged, hopefully persuaded, hopefully determined to make and to take an important next step.

Because today is Father's Day, the most important day of the year, and you think I'm kidding, though I am not, introductory remarks are not so necessary. You were somewhat prepared already as you arrived this morning. I think you'd have to be an ostrich with your head in the dirt to not know that today is Father's Day. And that would have some effect on your preparation for this message. Historically, this may surprise you. Historically, it is estimated that worldwide, only four of 10 men reproduce. Most men throughout history have been denied the opportunity to reproduce. Some few men have chosen to not reproduce. This message targets those of you, those few of the male sex, who have the responsibility of fatherhood. I hope this weighs heavily on you. I intend for it to.

I read 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 10, 11, and 12, a portion of the Apostle Paul's letter to new believers who were members of the congregation he established in Thessalonica. He writes, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you that believe. As you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that you would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory."

In the fall of 1982, I remember because I wrote it down, I began a study of scripture to discover the biblical keys to success as a father. And this is because I was learning as a young pastor that most fathers I had observed seemed to display little to no understanding of their responsibilities as a dad or the significance of the role they played in the lives of their children. Nada, zip, as well. It was obvious to me that God, the God of consequences, the God who instituted the law of sowing and reaping, as well as the physical law of the conservation of momentum, had determined that one of the consequences of sexual activity is paternity. A corollary being that the determination to avoid the normal and natural consequence of sexual activity is sinful. Let me state that again. The determination to avoid the normal and natural consequence of sexual activity is sinful.

Now, I was comfortable with the biblical principles related to being a good husband and a good wife, and even those principles related to being a good mother. But it was the principles pertaining to being a good father, not having had one, that escaped me. And still, I wanted to know those principles, not having had one. My next step to discovering the principles behind good fathering was a step that any child of God can take. I took my concordance down from the shelf and began to look up every verse in the Bible in which the word father is found. The word father and fathers are used almost 1,500 times in scripture. So my search wasn't particularly easy. Neither was it particularly interesting. But I continued to read.

What I was precisely looking for was a passage or passages that I hoped would summarize in a nutshell what being a father in the biblical sense really is. Because there's a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. So if you do what you just think is the right thing to do to be a dad, that's almost guaranteed to be wrong. You know what it took? It only took the willingness to examine in one fashion or another 1,486 verses of the Bible in which the word father or fathers is used to find what I was looking for. The only reason I was able to learn the truths I'm about to share with you was because I'm such a wonderful Bible scholar. Right? Wrong. The reason God shared this with me from his word is because I was willing to look. I was willing to look long. I was willing to look hard for it. Any one of you can do the same thing with a little help from your pastor from time to time.

What I discovered in later studies was that Paul's capsule survey of what good fathering is really was an illustration that he used to show good Christian ministry and what good Christian ministry is like. By that, I mean Paul told what being a good father was so that he could then show how his labor of love among the Thessalonians was like good fathering. In other words, good ministry is like good fathering. And good fathering is like good ministry.

So what I shall do for you, or to you, today is focus on fathering, of course, within the context of being a Christian dad, and then apply what we have learned to serving God in this church's various ministries. So let me define success as a Christian father. Success as a Christian father is not raising your children to have a wonderful career. Not. It is not raising your children to make lots of money. Not. Or to be famous. Not. Or

to be good at something. Not. Success as a father can be nothing less than raising children who come to know Jesus Christ as their savior and serve him once they leave home. What a kid does inside the house, you don't really know what he is until after he's gone. Because after he's gone, he's who he really is. Now, if he's who he really is while he's still at home, that's great. But you never really know until he's on his own. And it might be good to discover that somewhat sooner than later.

You can have success as a father. Dad, this success as a father is guaranteed by attending with diligence to two areas in your life. It's not terribly complicated. Two areas of your life, with failure to attend to these two areas of your life guaranteeing failure. Area number one, a father must be diligent in the area of qualifications. In verse 10 of 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, Paul refers to his behavior, and he uses three adverbs to describe his behavior. What was Paul's behavior like? His behavior was like any good Christian father's behavior ought to be. He writes, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you that believe."

Are you surprised to see Paul's reliance on the two or three witness principle that's found throughout the Bible? I'm not. Not only is God always watching, but others are as well. Of course. Of course. Chief among those witnessing what kind of father you are are your own children. It doesn't matter what I see. Doesn't matter what the neighbors see. Doesn't matter what the in-laws or the outlaws see. It matters what your kids see.

What would your kids like to see? First, a good father's behavior must be holy. Must be. This is not optional. Must be holy. Holy is an interesting word in the Bible. In a recent message, I spent some time on this matter of holiness. The usual Greek word for holy refers to something which is set aside for God. Therefore, you can be a saint. You can be a holy one without, at that moment of time, acting like a saint. It is possible for saints to momentarily act like not saints. Just by being a child of God, just because God's children are set aside by him and for him. And we're not entirely consistent. Nobody is. Anybody that says he is, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

That said, the Greek word translated holy here refers not to what you are, but refers to the way you behave. Meaning, Paul refers to a father as not only being a genuinely saved man, a Christian man, but acting like a Christian and having a lifestyle that is pleasing to God. So here, Paul refers to what people, in particular children, can see of their dad's relationship with God. They are witnesses that the relationship with God gives evidence of being holy.

Second, a good father's behavior must be just. Holy refers to what your kids think of your relationship with God is like. Justly refers to what your kids think your relationship with them is like. What kind of father are you, what kind of a dad are you? Are you one who provokes your son to wrath by being inconsistent and not careful to keep your word when it's given, or are you a father who strives to be fair in all your dealings? You see, if you are fair, you are not doing right by your son, and you're not doing right by your daughter. Let me give you an example. Oldest son George cannot get a bicycle until dad thinks he's old enough to ride it responsibly. And they've talked about it. But when George gets his bike at the age of seven, little brother Billy gets his bike at the age of

four. What's with that? Well, dad was just trying to be fair, but what he ended up doing was being unjust by having different standards for his two different sons. Fair to Billy, he risked provoking his oldest son to wrath. So how do you know that that happens? I'm a firstborn son. I know that happens.

Feel me? What the good father wants, so far as a relationship with his children is concerned, is for his children to know that their father does right by them, that he is with them just. And when a kid knows this of his father, he is confident that he knows where he stands with his dad just about all the time. And even if dad makes a mistake in his dealings with the child, which happens, his general tendency is to behave justly with his child, and his child will overlook the occasional flubs and the time-to-time flaws.

Third, a good father's behavior is unblamable. This refers not to a father's apparent relationship with God, or with his relationship with his child, that individual, but his relationship with everyone else. Remember, a child views everything from his own frame of reference. Holiness is what the child perceives of dad's relationship with God. Justly is what the child perceives to be dad's relationship with him. But now, we are dealing with what the child perceives as his dad being without blame with respect to everyone else. How does dad act around others from his child's perspective? How does the son or daughter think dad treats other people? How does dad treat mom? How does dad treat grandpa? How does dad treat uncle? How does dad treat my brothers and my sisters? How does dad treat his boss? How does dad treat his friends? How does dad treat the neighbors? If someone accuses dad of wrongdoing, would the youngster tend to believe dad was likely innocent or probably guilty? Kind of depends on whether the child was with dad the last time he made that weekend trip to the office to steal memo pads and ballpoint pens without his boss knowing about it. Doesn't it?

If dad is unblamable, or if anything he is charged with is totally unfounded, then the father's ministry in the life of the child is obviously greatly enhanced. So do you see what Paul has laid out for us here? Relationship with God, relationship with that individual child, and that child's perception of the dad's relationship with everybody else in their life. Every kid sees evidence of these three relationships in his father's life, or doesn't see evidence of those relationships in his father's life. And guess what? When the father opens his mouth to speak to his children, when these three areas are right, the child will tend to listen, even if he may not agree. And he's a lot more likely to agree with a dad who is this kind of dad. This kind of dad has credibility because there's bottom to him. There's gravitas.

But if the father is not perceived to be holy, is not perceived to be just, is not perceived to be unblamable, the child will be sorely tempted to lose respect for his father. Because the one thing kids of his age, or any other age, hate, it's hypocrisy. Even though they themselves are hypocrites so much of the time. Parents, especially fathers, do you have kids who sneer at your direction and rebel against you? Are your sons here this morning with you, showing you honor? Are they honoring you this morning? Perhaps it is because holy, just, unblamable, and it's not other people. It's you, Dad. It's you.

If you are holy, and if you are just, and if you are unblamable, it won't matter much to your kids about anybody else. What matters is you. And if you are holy and just and unblamable, won't you have personal standards that you will impose upon your children, that you will impose upon your household, that you will insist upon by those who abide under your roof? Of course you will. Of course you will. There is no such thing. There is no such thing as a father behaving holy, justly, and unblamably whose child willfully and flagrantly and repeatedly violates his father's will without that father responding to quash the rebellion. And if you try to rationalize your child's rebellion by saying, "Well, it's the kid's fault. What could her mother and I do?" Especially if you are one of these wimpy, passive fathers who is too timid and too afraid to project your values on those who live in your home and under your roof and eat your food and wear your clothes. Remember this. Successful parents usually think good parenting is the key to child rearing. Unsuccessful parents usually try to lay blame on their children.

Paul realized that, whether as a father or as a gospel minister, you have no chance whatsoever at success in rearing children or in raising up godly Christians unless you're qualified. How you conduct yourself will be the key to your success. Behave holy, justly, and unblamably.

Area number two, in addition to being diligent in the area of qualifications, the father must also be diligent in the area of instructions. That is, having gained your children as your audience as a result of your godly lifestyle, a dad has to then take advantage of his opportunity and actually communicate with his children on the subjects of the vital issues of life, of eternity, and of service to God. Verse 11 contains Paul's manner of instruction to serve as a dad's pattern. "As you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children."

Notice that the particulars of a good dad's instructions deal with the future, the past, and the present in his child's life. Exhortation refers to urging someone to pursue a future course of conduct, urging a son or a daughter to set goals, to strive for them, and making sure they are worthy goals. Helping your child prepare for success in school, developing into a proper Christian man or woman, and things of that nature, things that will happen in the future. And how could a dad be considered a good dad who did not provide the kind of proper direction to his children on who they should marry? Of course, you talk to your kids about what kind of person they should marry, and how they should prepare for eternity, and what they should consider as fit service to God. You don't just live for yourself, right? You don't just do what you want, right? Humanity is more important than such trivialities as that. Yet, some dads never engage in a discussion of such issues with their children. And that's sad. I have no recollection of my father ever engaging with me in such a discussion.

So let me illustrate. A dad says, "Honey, I will work with you to make sure you're on the honor roll next term. And if you're not on the honor roll, and I know you can, I know you can achieve honor roll status, I know you, honey, I know you can, I'm just not sure you will. And so, I want you to know that I'm going to work with you so that you're on the honor roll. And, honey, if you're not on the honor roll next time, and every time after that,

there's going to be consequences, hun. You understand, there's going to be consequences. You have to measure up to a great deal of your potential. That's necessary."

Comfort refers to consolation in the event of a tragedy or the experiencing of a personal pain. This is the right now with some dads. Some dads laugh at their children's emotional pain. Kid comes home brokenhearted, and dad laughs at him, or they even ridicule a little one's heartaches that seem very important to the child, but not important to the dad. But a good father will put his arm around his child, and he'll love on his kid through the difficulties and through the stresses of life. And it doesn't really matter whether your dad was very affectionate or not. If your kid needs that, you get that. Now, some kids don't want that. But if your kid needs that, you give them that. You often hear young people thank individuals, and they'll say, "Well, I want to thank so-and-so because he was there for me." Well, this is typically what they are expressing appreciation for, is it not? Empathize with your child. Provide direction from God's word for coping with the problem that is faced, and offer them hope.

The word *charge* translates the common Greek word for martyr. It means to witness and share in personal experiences. Something most fathers rarely do with their children. Or if they do, it's only infrequently. Some of the most wonderful times I ever had with my daughter were times when we would just lay down on the bed together at her bedtime, and she would ask me to tell her a story. And I would conjure up a yarn of some kind. And I would tell her, I would relate to her events that occurred in my life, and how I thought they would be tragic events, and how there was light at the end of a tunnel, and it wasn't the headlight of an oncoming freight train. And I related my experiences, both the good and the bad, to her. I mean, not all the bad, but some of them, and what I have tried to learn from those experiences, I've related to her.

I remember telling her one time that I was with my grandparents in the panhandle of Texas, and my grandmother reached up and broke, snapped off a twig from a willow tree. Anybody ever have that happen, or granny reaches up and snaps off a twig, and then she strips the leaves off, and you had the misfortune at that moment of being wearing shorts, and I had to dance in the spirit as my grandmother is doing this across my legs. I remember I mentioned that to my grandmother years later, and I told her what an important part of my life it was, what a learning experience. She had no recollection of it, but I gave her a hug and a kiss for doing it anyway, because it was important to me. There's things that you're going to forget about, Dad, that your kid will remember forever. Kids need for their dads to share those kinds of experiences. Kids need for dad to share his life with them, and to put those experiences into perspective with the word of God, so they can prepare for the future.

Now, notice the parallel. It is this parallel that tells us Paul was referring to good father-type behavior. He wrote, "as a father doth his children." Dad, do you engage in this kind of stuff with your kids? If not, you're not the right kind of dad, are you? Well, I just, that's just not me. Well, then "me" is not a good dad, because this is what good dads do. As for me, this same type of relationship is supposed to exist between a pastor and the

flock. But how many people are there who will allow their pastor in our day to interpose himself into their lives? Not many, sad to say. Far fewer than used to be the case. I spoke on this problem last night during my Zoom session. Some churches, they have members that will allow their pastor to minister to them. They share enough of their life so their pastor can exhort them, and can comfort them, and can charge them. They will mention their plans, and they will ask for input, or say something about their marriage or parenting challenges, and seek counsel.

Pastors, it's not a pastor's job to make anyone's decision for them, but to offer them counsel about what considerations there ought to be in the decision-making process. But most people these days will do everything from buy a new car or house, to make plans for radical alterations of their family life, to surreptitiously making plans for marriage, without giving their pastor much opportunity to be a blessing in any way. Of course, you can do what you want, but as time goes on, and as this church progresses, please understand something. It is the people who allow a pastor to really and truly pastor them who can expect to have places to serve. While those who refuse pastoral counsel, which is everybody's right, nobody has to seek pastoral counsel. But those who refuse pastoral counsel, or who deny a scriptural place in their lives for a pastor, will probably move on and eventually attend church somewhere else. And it will almost certainly, has been my observation, it will be at some church where they will be rather anonymous, and where the pastor will not love them enough to want to really be their pastor.

Verse 11 contains a father's proper manner of instruction, how to go about training your child. Verse 12 contains a father's proper motive for instruction. What drives your efforts as a dad? What's on your mind? What's on your heart? "That you would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." What are you after, dad? What do you want from your kids? Well, I want him to graduate high school and leave. Okay. What do you want, what do you want from your kids, and what do you want for your kids? The response Paul was after, and the response you should be after, is this: that your kids would walk worthy of God. Anything else is short of the mark.

If the instructed response is walking worthy of God, what is the instructed reason? Why should a child, spiritual child or natural child, why should a child walk worthy? Because it's right. Well, yes. But there's another reason given in addition. Do it because it's right. And that's because you've been called to his kingdom and glory. Improper behavior is simply not worthy of one who is a child of God and who is going to heaven. And kids need to be taught that you are more important than just to dribble your life away with meaningless nonsense. You bear the image of God. And that ought to be reflected in the approach you take to life.

So, while I cut up and joke a lot about little girls growing to be women, and little boys growing up to be big boys, there is a point at which the issues before you as a father can be addressed only by someone who is mature, only by someone who is genuinely converted, and only by someone who is truly committed to glorifying God in his life and in his family.

So, how many times do we hear men say, and oh, this just grates me. My best friend in the ministry, I heard him say that. No, don't say that. Say, what did he say? He said, my wife did a good job of raising our kids. Now, don't get me wrong. I think compliments are wonderful, and that good moms are profoundly important in every child's life and upbringing. I don't want to minimize the significance of moms. I had a great mom. I wish she would have been a Christian, but for being a non-Christian, she was quite a good mom. But despite that about moms, let me point something out to you about dads.

Dads, the Bible reads, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." Proverbs 1:8. Additionally, take note of these dad verses in Proverbs alone. Proverbs 2:1, "My son, if thou wilt hear my words." Proverbs 3:1, "My son, forget not my law." Proverbs 4:10, "Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings." Proverbs 4:20, "My son, attend to my words. Incline thine ear unto my sayings." Dad, you better have something to say. And what you say better be the right things to say, right? Because there's a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Your way is usually the wrong way. This is the right way. You better know this enough that you can teach these things to your children. Proverbs 5:1, "My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding." But the fear of the Lord is the beginning of understanding, right? You don't have any understanding if you don't fear God. Proverbs 6:20, "My son, keep thy father's commandment." Proverbs 7:1, "My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee."

When Paul compared his ministry to a mother's, which he did a couple of verses before, he noted those affectionate traits and the devotion that described his ministry, but the teaching aspect of his ministry, he likened to a father teaching his children. And this reflects what we see clearly in Proverbs. Dad, according to the word of God, you are to be the primary teacher of God's word, the primary teacher of godly principles, and the primary teacher of eternal values to your kids, not your wife. If you don't do that, you've shortchanged your children. If you're not that kind of dad, you are also the most significant, if not the most frequent, parent who disciplines. If you choose not to discipline your children, you withhold from them the proof that you love them. Hebrews 12, verses 6, 7, and 8.

You are not permitted to provide the money while your wife raises your children. Her God-ordained ministry is to support your child-rearing. This obviously means that most families in our culture are not obeying God's plan for child-rearing, which I think explains so many of our social and societal problems. And, dad, it's your job. Your job to address this problem. If you are a typical American father, then you were raised in a home that had a spiritually weak father image and a stronger mother figure. Dad may have been tough in some ways, but mom raised the kids. She may have even neutered her husband in the eyes of her children by doing things behind dad's back that undermined his position in the lives of the children. Don't subject your child to that. Obey God.

Be strong. Be responsible enough to raise up a generation of men who know how to be men, and women who know how to be women. And in the area of Christian service, be like a father. Diligence in the area of qualification, so people will respect you. Then,

you'll be able to teach them in word as well as deed to walk worthy of God. Has some light been turned on a bit this morning, some illumination? Do you now see why some things are the way they are, dad? Mom, do you have an idea how your ministry can be more productive and truly fruitful to both you who are parents, and you folks who have a ministry?

I challenge you to be what you need to be, so that you can do what needs to be done for your kids to turn out right, for those you serve to grow up right as Christians. You need to be committed to Christ and living for him. You need to be qualified. You need to properly instruct. I'm not discounting the grace of God in the life of every sinner, but there's a reason why God wanted dads to be good dads. There's a reason for it.

This is one of our goals at Calvary Road Baptist Church. From our scheduled worship services, to our discipleship sessions that function under pastoral oversight, to our upcoming men's advance. We are each of us works in progress, but progress is what is needed. Amen. God help us as a country for not raising our little boys and influencing our grandsons to be men of God. Men of God.

Let's stand for prayer, please. Father, we thank you for the word of God. We appreciate so much the opportunity in very concise language, the template, the job description, if you will, for a Christian dad. And I pray, Lord, we know, I'm an example of a kid that was not raised in a Christian home. And I did not have a Christian dad. And now, I've enjoyed my relationship with you for 51 years. But there is a reason why you want dads to be good dads. It glorifies you. It honors you. It helps the children. It reflects well on your nature and your essence. And we should take very seriously the task that has been given to us. We who are fathers to discharge our duties, obligations, and responsibilities in the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, which is the beginning of understanding. Help us to do it right, not lackadaisically, not haphazardly, not casually, not as if this task is unimportant, because it is. We thank you that in our country, we celebrate Father's Day. I pray that you might help us, by your grace, to be better dads, so that our children, who we love, we will love even more, more passionately, more intelligently, more scripturally, to the end that they might live for you, love you, and serve you as well. We pray this in Jesus' name, and for his sake. Amen.