

# **FAMOUS FATHERS-THEIR FAITH AND DUTIES**

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## **1. THE FIRST FATHER Based on Gen. 4:1-8, 25-26**

**Ronald and Nancy Reagan had something in common in their childhood, and that was that they both had fallen fathers. When Ron came home one day as an 11 year old boy he found his father flat on his back on the front porch, and there was no one there to help. He said, "He was drunk, dead to the world. I stood over him a minute or two. I wanted to let myself into the house and go to bed and pretend he wasn't there..."**

**Nancy's experience was even worse. She writes in her autobiography, "I was told as a child my father wasn't at the hospital when I was born. It must have hurt mother as much as it did me when I heard about it. I have no idea how old I was before he saw me**

**for the first time, but I visited him only a few times over the years before he died in the 1960's. He was my father but I somehow never could think of him that way because there had never been any relationship of any kind."**

**Alcoholism and abandonment was is what our former President and his wife remember about fatherhood. But it is a mistake to conclude that only those who are themselves failures are fallen fathers. The record of the Bible and history will not support such a conclusion. Being a good father is job that even the most successful of men fail at. The West German Industrialist Friedrich Flick was a business genius who built an empire of 300 firms, and a personal fortune of over a billion dollars. But he had one very conspicuous shortcoming. He could not control his own children. Success in any area of life is not guarantee that a man will not fail and foul out as a father.**

**David was one of the most successful men of the Bible. He was a man after God's own heart, and he led Israel to power and wealth, but he left behind a family all messed up because of his failure as a father. Eli the great priest had sons that would be a disgrace to a pornographer because they sexually assaulted women as they came to worship. The list could go on and on, but the point is not to make fatherhood depressing, but to see that it has always been hard to be a successful father. There is hope for success, however, even in this difficult business of being a dad. We want to look at both the hardness and the hope in fatherhood by looking at the life of Adam. We want to look at him from 3 perspectives.**

## **I. ADAM AS THE FIRST FATHER.**

**Adam was at one time the only father on the face of the earth. He had no Dr. Spock, and even if he did there was no one to call for help.**

**There were no books or articles, nor any examples to follow. He could not reflect and say this is how my father would deal with me in this situation. Adam had no training to be a father. Most of us at least saw a baby before we became fathers, but not Adam. He was the first man to ever see a baby born. You think its scary now, but what must it have been for a man who had no experience whatever?**

**Somehow Adam managed and everybody survived. The male population of the world was doubled in one day. Now there was another potential father on earth, and this baby did become the second father in history, but Cain also became the first to murder. This did not do anything to enhance the record of the first father. We will look at this further in the next point. But what we learn from this experience of the first father is that fatherhood has different stages, and some of them are easy and some are hard.**

**Cain, as a newborn baby, was without a doubt the delight of Adam and Eve. He was the first baby; the first toddler; the first to talk and walk, and do all the things that make children so enjoyable. It seems hard to have small children, but this is really the easy time. When precious little Cain grows up he will become a pain. He ended up killing their second born. Adam had a host of unusual and unrepeatable experiences as the first father. For one thing, he was only one year older than his first baby himself in terms of time. Adam was only created about a year before Cain was born. Nobody has ever had this experience. Then, he of course was also the first grandfather, great grandfather, and great great and so on and on. Adam was the first in many ways and no one can ever take these titles away from him.**

**What we need to see here is that every human being who has ever lived came out of the body of Adam. He is literally the father of every person ever born. Eve was taken out of his body and so there is**

**not even one exception. Not even Jesus, for he has called the second or last Adam. He to come into a body who came from the seed of Adam. The entire human race is an extension of the body of Adam. He was the first father of all, and the father of all first.**

**As the first father he was also the first father to ever lose a child to death. Millions have since then, but Adam was the first, and this is one of the hard parts of fatherhood. Daniel Webster, the eloquent orator, got a letter in his senate office telling of his son being killed in the Mexican War. He wrote to his second son and said, "I hardly know how I shall keep up under this blow. I have always regarded it as a great misfortune to out live my children, but the will of heaven be done in all things."**

**From the first family in this world until today the loss of a child has been one of the hardest burdens to bear. Our heavenly Father entered into this heaviest of burdens, and He endured the loss of His Son to death. He was the one Father who did not ever need to experience this suffering, but he chose it freely that Adam and all the father of history might, like David, have hope of seeing and being with their lost children forever, by faith in that Son of God who died that all might live. Next we look at-**

## **II. ADAM AS THE FALLEN FATHER.**

**Adam was an ideal man, but he fell before he became a father so that when Cain was born Adam not only became the first father, but he became the first fallen father. This means there has never been a time in the history of man when there was a perfect father. The heavenly Father was always there, but there has never been an unfallen human father. The only one who could have changed this was Jesus, but He never became a father, and so we are stuck with this reality.**

**There was once an ideal man and woman. There was once an ideal environment. But there has never been ideal relationship of parent and child, because there has never been an ideal parent. This could lead to pessimism if there was no good news to balance things out. We could end up thinking like Lord Chesterfield who said, "As fathers commonly go, it is seldom a misfortune to be fatherless; and considering the general runs of sons, as seldom a misfortune to be childless." There is much evidence to support his negative conviction in a fallen world with nothing but fallen fathers and children.**

**It is a reality that we have to face up to, for all the notable fathers of the Bible had a very mixed record of success. It was not just Adam who had good and bad children. Look at Abraham the father of the faithful. His boys Isaac and Ishmael fought as boys, and their descendants, the Jews and Arabs, have kept the whole world under tension to the modern day. David had sons who raped, murdered, and led rebellion against him. Even his favorite son Solomon, who became such a notable success, also led Israel into idolatry because of his many foreign wives. In the New Testament the most notable father is the father of the Prodigal. He was a good and righteous man, but he had one son who was a rebel, and the other was a spoiled snob.**

**The point is, the easy part of fatherhood is when children are babies and young. Adam, no doubt, had a ball with his little Cain, for this was the joyful part of fatherhood. But when a child grows up to be independent fathers feel the burden of their role. How can they keep their children on the right path? Adam couldn't do it, and most of the fathers of the Bible could not do it. Cain became his deepest pain, and as a fallen father Adam learned by experience how God was hurt by his own disobedience. When a father sees a son rebel and hurt everyone he loves, then a father begins to taste of the pain of God. It is a terrible way to get an education in the depth of spiritual**

**pain, but there are few fathers who escape this lesson in suffering.**

**Is there any value in such pain? Yes there is, for it makes the fallen father realize that the only solution to the fall of man is grace. You can't beat sin out of man, nor can you teach it out, or train it out. The only answer is forgiveness. God forgave Adam, and one of the most amazing stories of grace we have in the Bible is God's preservation of Cain. If capital punishment was ever called for, it was in the case of Cain. But God put a mark on Cain to protect him so that no one would kill him. To do so would result in suffering vengeance 7 times over. The only ultimate answer to sin is forgiveness. There is no other way to get rid of it. It is the only answer of the heavenly Father, and it is the only answer the fallen father has that will make a difference in the world, and in their families. Forgiveness was the only reason the family of man survived, and the only way any father can keep his family alive is by the power of forgiveness. Adam knew how to receive it and give it, and this leads to our third point-**

### **III. ADAM AS THE FAITHFUL FATHER.**

**We do not have a lot of evidence to evaluate the family life of Adam, but what little we do have is quite revealing as to his positive role as the father of human family. He was down, but not out. He did not say that this is such a lousy world to raise kids in that he refused to have them. He obeyed God's command to be fruitful and reproduce. We do not know how many children he had, but with the three clearly named and then the general statement that he had other sons and daughters, we have an absolute minimum of 7, and it was likely much higher than that. It could have been dozens.**

**His record of faithfulness to his family is unsurpassed. Adam was married to the same woman for 930 years. This was the longest**

**marriage in history. Methuselah lived 39 years longer than Adam, but he did not get married and have his first child until he was 187, and so he was no where near the record of Adam. This means also that Adam was a father longer than any other man who ever lived. But more important, his fall did not make him the scum of the earth. He was not a bad man, nor a bad father. He was fallen and not perfect, but a fallen and imperfect father can still do a lot of things right, and Adam did.**

**He saw to it that his two boys got a religious education. Both Cain and Able grew up and brought offerings to the Lord. They were taught to honor God and make sacrifice to Him. Adam saw to it that his boys learned a positive respect for their Creator. To be sure, Cain was only externally respectful while his heart was far from God, but he knew the right way. Able was the righteous son, and he did what was pleasing to God. It was a 50-50 ratio of success and failure for Adam. The point is, he made sure that his children knew the way that was pleasing to God. A father cannot impose his faith on his children and make them love and honor God, but he can make sure that that option is one of their choices. If they do not take the right choice, the father has still fulfilled his role.**

**Some fathers are blamed for their sons bad choices, but Adam is not blamed for the evil choice of Cain. We can't say Adam left him such a poor example that it was inevitable that he went the wrong way. Able did not go that way, but went the way he was taught. We have every reason to believe that Adam was a great father, and was one who lived his life in fellowship with God, and in obedience to His will. He fell, but he did not go on in rebellion. He was grateful for God's guidance, and when he saw Eve bring forth another son he acknowledged God as the giver of this new life to replace the son he had lost. It was the line of Seth that brought forth the righteous in a world of great corruption. Enoch who walked with God and the**

**righteous Noah whom God used to preserve the human race were just two examples.**

**Adam produced the fallen race, but he also produced the righteous race of those who sought to live in obedience to God. There is no escape being the evidence, for he was a fallen but nevertheless a faithful father, and he did a great job of teaching and being an example of righteousness. In Gen. 5:3 we have this interesting text that says Adam was 130 years old when Seth was born, and it stresses that this son was in his likeness, and in his own image. Seth apparently looked just like Adam. This was not said of his first 2 boys. He was a chip off the old block, and this was a great encouragement to Adam. Some of him would live on in his son even though he knew he had to die because of his sin. Fathers love it when their children look like him. Richard Armour wrote-**

**My day-old is plenty scrawny,  
His mouth is wide with screams, or yawny,  
His ears seem larger than he's needing,  
His nose is flat, his chin's receding,  
His skin is very, very red,  
He has no hair upon his head,  
And yet I'm proud as proud can be,  
To hear you say he looks like me.**

**Adam was proud of Seth and rightly so, for Seth carried on the tradition of his faithful father, and he was a righteous man in a fallen world. It is very good news that it is possible to be a major force for good in a world that you have made so bad yourself. All of us are spotted with adamic muck. We have contributed to the fallenness of our world. We have all been part of the problem, but by the grace of God we can still be part of the answer, and a major part of the answer is in being a faithful father. Just hanging in there trying to**



**have an impact on our children's lives, even when some of them are, like Cain, going off the deep end of rebellion, is what being a faithful father is all about.**

**When you have two sons and one becomes a homicide victim, and the other is the murderer, you would have a tendency to call it quits on the role of fatherhood. Adam did not choose defeat in this pessimistic situation. He said I will try again, and because he was faithful there was a line of the human race worth saving when God judged the world. Had Adam given up on fatherhood because of failure it would have been the end of history for man. We are ultimately saved by the last Adam, the Lord Jesus, but let's not forget there would have been nobody to save had it not been for the faithfulness of the first Adam.**

**Adam is just a prime example of what God can do through a fallen father who will be faithful in spite of his fallenness. Fathers can have such a powerful influence on the future because of how they impact their children. All of Cain's line perished in the flood, but the line of Seth survived, because even a fallen father can have a powerful impact on the future.**

**However you may find fault with the Bible movies of Cecil B. De Mille you can't escape the fact that he has made parts of the Bible well known to millions who otherwise may never have known a thing about the Bible. His father use to read a chapter of the Old Testament and the New Testament to him every night. He read to make an impact on his son, and this he surely did. De Mille reflecting on his father's reading wrote, "He painted a great picture as he read, and the picture came to life before your eyes. Some of those pictures I brought to life again in later years. I have been able to recreate them on the screen." A fallen father faithful in is honoring of the Word of God will have an impact on His children for good.**

**Some of the greatest influence for the good of the family in our world today are the result of fallen fathers who were nevertheless faithful fathers. Dr. James Dobson is one of the most notable. He says his father had all kinds of faults, but he also said this at his father's funeral. "This man whose body lies before me was not only my father and my friend, but he was also the source of great inspiration for me. Few people realize that most of my writings are actually an expression of his views and his teachings. Whenever we were together, he would talk and I usually took notes. That's the kind of relationship we had, and his loss is devastating to me." I can imagine Seth saying something like that at Adam's funeral.**

**It is true that we must trace the fall of man to Adam, and there is no way to minimize the harm he brought to the human race by his sin. But the fact remains that somebody has to have been an example of righteousness in that beginning generation, and the evidence points to Adam. God used His influence to send through history a line of fallen but faithful people whom God used to accomplish His purpose. There is not another sin recorded in the life of Adam after his fall. His wife stayed with him for 930 years, and he taught his children to honor God. The message of his life is that fathering is hard, failure is easy, but never give up, for fallen though we be, God can use our faithfulness to accomplish His purpose in the world.**

## **2. THE FATHER OF THE FUTURE Based on Gen. 7:1-12**

**It is tough to be a father in this world where everything is changing so fast. In Africa the custom of selling the bride to her future husband has been challenged for sometime by Christian daughters.**

**They feel it is a evil custom to be sold like an object to the highest bidder. They have organized protest groups, and Christian girls have been defying their fathers and refusing to marry for money. The old people try to frighten the young by saying, "Your children will be born deformed if the price is not paid," but the better educated younger generation are not falling for that scare tactic.**

**So you have fathers caught in a world of transition where the old just doesn't work anymore and the new is so different that it is frightening. Every father on the planet faces some of this tension, but we want to look at the father who faced the most radical transition of history. Noah saw the whole world of his day disappear, and he was left as the only father on the planet. He had to begin a whole new world with his family. No father in history ever carried a heavier load of responsibility than did Noah.**

**Adam and Noah are the only two men in history who have this distinction of being the only father in the world in their time. None of the three sons who were near 100 years old had any children, and in spite of a year on board the ark none of them became a father during that long ordeal. This was clearly not a love boat cruise. We do not know if they had some birth control method, or if God just closed up their wombs to prevent any children being born on the ark. They all had good size families after the ark landed, and so there was no problem of infertility. So what we have here is an example of family planning. Either by their own wisdom, or by God's providence they postponed their families until the circumstances were favorable.**

**We read in Gen. 11:10 that Shem waited 2 years after the flood to begin his family, and he was 100 years old. His descendants had their children in their 20's or 30's, but he waiting until they were settled, even in his old age. So we see that the whole issue of family planning is based on the circumstances. There is no support for the thinking**

**that it is such an evil world to bring a child into that people should not have children. If Noah would have thought that way, we never would have heard of him, and he would not have become the father of the future. Noah had children in the worst of times, for they were the only hope of bad times better. There is biblical support for not having kids because the world is evil. However, there is support for not having children when there is grave danger, and their presence would be a threat to themselves and the well being of their parents.**

**If you study the ages of the fathers in the Bible, you discover that those who waited for the right time were often the best fathers. Older fathers are not looked down on, but are heroes in the Bible. Noah is the prime example. If you study chapter 5, you will see the record of 10 fathers who became fathers from the age of 65 for Enoch to 187 for Methusalah. But then you come to Noah who went for 313 years longer than Methusalah to become a father. Noah was, to the best of my knowledge, the oldest man in the Bible to become a father, and the oldest in history.**

**I was just barely 21 when I became a father, and the majority of people in our culture who become fathers do so in their 20's or 30's. But here was Noah who lived 500 years before he became a father, and each of his 3 boys lived to nearly 100 before they became fathers. The end result of all this late fatherhood was that there were no children on the ark. God is saying by His providence in this whole matter that there are times and places where children are not a good idea. They are the future, to be sure, but the ark was no place for kids, and God saw to it that there were no kids in that dangerous situation.**

**Today and all through history the ark and children have been linked. It is probably the number one story for children, but God prevented there being any children on the actual ark. Noah and his**

wife had to live for a century without grandchildren, and each of the boys had to live 3 times longer than the average father of their day without children just to keep the ark child free. It is hard to look at these facts and escape the conclusion that there are times when family planning is definitely God's will. That is what Jesus was getting at in Matt. 24:19 when he said, "How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers." He was warning Christians not to have children just before 70 A. D. when they would have to flee the judgment of God on Jerusalem. Like Noah, they were wise if they postponed their family until after the storm. A time of judgment is never a good time to become a father or a mother.

Noah fathered the 3 fathers who fathered the human race all over again, but on the ark he was the only father in the world. Can you imagine babies and toddlers on the ark? These little creatures will gag at the sight of good food, but then go and drink the dog's water and lick the cat. They will stick every dirty thing they can find in their mouth. With several thousand animals around it would be a full time job just in life saving prevention. God spared these 4 couples from parenthood, for on their survival the whole future depended. There is a lot we don't know, of course, about what kind of father Noah was, but we have strong evidence that Noah spent a lot of time with his family.

If you read Gen. 7:11 you will see that Noah was in the 17th day of the second month of his 600th year of life when the flood started, and in 8:14 we read that he was in the 27th day of the second month of his 601st year of life when the flood was over, and he stepped out onto dry land. That means that for 1 year and 10 days Noah was locked in with his family without monopoly, checkers, or a stereo. They were a busy family caring for their zoo, but they had plenty of time to be with each other. It was a family group of 8 people. It was the only small group in the world, but it was enough. All anyone

**really needs is to be a part of a small group of loving and caring people to be a healthy and happy person.**

**You do not have to be popular, famous, or successful in the eyes of the crowd, but you do need to be a part of a small group where you are loved and accepted, and that is what they had on the ark. Everybody in the world was in their small group supporting and encouraging one another as they rode out the world's worst storm. Now you might object that Noah had no choice in the matter. He was forced to be with his family and not off selling souvenir miniature arks to the masses who would come to see the strange sight. It was, no doubt, the tourist attraction of the world, and Noah could have made a fortune. He could have become a workaholic neglecting his family, but the evidence clearly reveals that Noah spent time with his family even before the flood forced them into the ark.**

**Look at these amazing facts. Noah was a great man of prayer. He is linked with Daniel and Job as the 3 great intercessors of the Old Testament, and yet he could not by prayer save a single soul outside of his 3 sons and their wives. Noah's father Lamech died just 5 years before the flood, but Noah had brothers and sisters alive, but as their oldest brother he could not persuade them to join him in the ark. He preached for over 100 years and did not win a single convert. He had tree cutters, carpenters, and helpers of all kinds, but as their boss he never won a single one by his authority.**

**As a preacher and a prayer warrior, and as a brother and a uncle Noah could not save a single person. All of his success in saving people was as a father. By his role as a father he saved his sons and their wives. His greatest success in life was as a father. Had he failed as a father there would have been no future. His boys were old enough to be independent of Noah, and like the rest of his family and the community could have told him to go jump in the lake. But they**

**did not do so. They were a close family, and so we see the evidence of Noah being a father who spent time with his sons, and he won their love and loyalty.**

**Many fathers, when their family is grown up, realize that if they had to do it over again they would have spent more time with them. It goes so fast, and this opportunity to love the children while they are children is gone before you realize it. The wisest fathers in the world are those who somehow get an insight into the value of spending quality time with their children. Children know how much you love them in proportion to the amount of time you spend with them. H. Thompson wrote,**

**Look at him!  
He spends time as if  
He were a millionaire!  
It's golden sands he heaps  
Upon his children as if  
They were his heirs.  
Awake! Do you not know  
The problems of the world await?  
Whence thy puritan pride?  
Work does not wait nor time or tide!  
I gaze upon him to despise  
But turn and envy, yea greed, and surprise.  
For he spends time as if  
He were a millionaire.**

**Here is a man who knows a good investment when he sees it. Noah invested in his boys, and the payoff was that he saved the world and became, not only the best father of his day, but the father of the future. By his fathering he made possible a future of the human race. One good father in a wicked world was all God needed to save the**

**future of mankind. Good fathering is one of the best investments any man can make in the future. Noah could have made a fortune, and he could have had the biggest house in town. He already had the biggest boat, but he could have given his life to the acquiring of material possessions, and none of it would have made it into the future. But he invested in his children, and they became the future. All of us are a part of history because of this one father who gave time to his family.**

**We are not here just because of our own father. We are here because of father Noah, and because of his effectiveness as a father. Had his three boys said, "Forget it dad. We are not going to move into that stupid boat." That would have been the ultimate in birth control and zero population growth, and the end of the world without a miracle of God. But they did not say that. They joined together as a family and rode the ark into the future-our future. One good father is all it takes to have a future yet today. Invest in your children and the future will be better.**

**The paradox is that Noah was not the father with the large family. Three sons was not a large family in that day. He did not even have any daughters of his own. He was not unique at all in terms of the number in his family. What made him unique was that he was righteous in a wicked world. He gave his children a foundation in faith. God chose him because he would assure that the future would have people in it that worshiped Him and sought to know His will. You can give your kids everything on earth, but if you do not give them this kind of foundation in faith you can never be the best kind of father.**

**We can assume that Noah had many of the common experiences of fatherhood. It can often be a chore to raise kids. L. D. Stewart said a man is not really a father until he has pulled his first Lincoln log out of the toilet bowl. He had to pull an assorted variety of toys out of it,**



**and that is part of fatherhood. But all of the things you do to save things from children and save them from themselves, are of no lasting value for the future if you do not give them a foundation of faith in God. Without an eternal perspective there is no ultimate future.**

**Noah was a great role model for his children, for he was able to be the only man alive who remained faithful to God when his whole culture was calling him a fool. That had to be hard, but he stood fast and did not conform to the world for the sake of making it easier for his family. The boys were likely teased by other kids in the neighborhood. They were the non-conformists in their culture. It would have been tempting to back away and tell God you could not build the ark because it was too much pressure on the family. But Noah obeyed God whatever the cost. "Let the world laugh and humiliate us, we are going to do the will of God." This was his attitude, and by it he saved his family. Had they had a different kind of father they would have perished with the rest of the world.**

**Here was a father who put God first in his life. He chose to be a miserable minority going against the grain. His boys probably did complain at times that it was very difficult to put up with the mockery. Noah had to do a lot of encouraging to keep them faithful. This is the hard part of fatherhood-the keeping children committed to God's way when the world says it is folly. But a good father is one who does not go by what is popular, and what the polls say, but by what God says. He made it clear to his family that God's will was always first for that family, and whatever the cost, that was the way they would live. May God help each of us fathers have this kind of commitment so that our children always know where we stand, and commit themselves to carry this faith into the future. Noah was the father of the future of all of us, but all of us fathers are the fathers of the future of our children and generations to come until God ends history with the coming of His Son to begin eternity.**

### **3. A FATHER'S FEARS Based on Judges 13:1-13, 24**

**According to the Guinness Book of Records the last Emperor of Morocco, Moulay Ismail, who lived 100 years from 1627 to 1727 was reported to have fathered 548 sons and 340 daughters for a grand total of 888. He would, no doubt, say amen to the brief poem of Wilhelm Busch, "Becoming a father is easy enough, but being one can be rough."**

**This may be true for many and even most, but that fact is, fatherhood is not easy for a large number of men in the Bible, and in our contemporary world. We tend to think of the mothers who can't have children, and we say poor Sarah, poor Rebekah, and poor Rachel. This is legitimate compassion for these barren women, but seldom to never do we hear the same compassion for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham is the most famous father in all of history, but he could not become a father for decades. The husbands of barren women we now know may be the ones who are infertile. But regardless of the cause, it is just as hard to be a non-father as to be a non-mother.**

**We have many records of this in our day. Tom Holman, a clinical psychologist, wrote an article entitled Becoming A Father The Hard Way. Not only was he infertile, but his wife had endometriosis and was forced to have an hysterectomy. After years of trying they both had to give up their dream, but they couldn't let it die. They finally flew to India where a 4 year-old girl Sumi was placed in their care, and they became parents. Doctors, lawyers, pastors, professional people, and blue-collar people of all kinds are going through the struggle every day to make their dreams of parenthood come true. It is seldom seen, however, as a father's struggle.**

**Michel Robinson, a teacher and associate editor of Nurturing News: A Quarterly Forum For Nurturing Men, writes about his wife's miscarriage. All of their friends used him as a mere conduit through which messages were forwarded to his wife, as if the loss was only hers, and he was a mere observer. It was a miscarriage of his fatherhood as well, but nobody saw his loss, and nobody felt his sorrow and anger. This is going on everyday around the world, and we are all guilty of being insensitive to a father's battle to become a father. We want to look at the father of the strongest man whoever lived in this message. He was Manoah the father of Samson. His wife was sterile and he had to live with a dying dream and the fear that he would never get the chance to be a father. But God intervened and promised he would have a son who was to be a very unique son. No sooner is this biggest battle won and his fatherhood guaranteed when we see Manoah expressing a second fear of fathers.**

## **I. THE FEAR OF FAILURE.**

**The son is only a promise, but already Manoah is filled with anxiety. He is overcome by his inadequacy to be a father. In verse 8 he cries out in prayer, "O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born." This was pre-Dr. Spock days, and nobody had a book on the market on how to raise a miracle baby as a Nazarite. Manoah was feeling pre-father panic, for he had no idea of how to be a father. This is a common fear of fathers. Most new fathers know more about a car than a child. Being a father is so much trial and error, and there are no erasers.**

**D. L. Stewart in Fathers Are People Too says that they teach you in high school how to find the square root of pi, but not how to find the key to the bathroom when your wife is out and your 3 year old is locked inside with the water running under the door. In college they**

**teach you how to put together a term paper on 18th century journalism, but nobody teaches you how to put together a 10 speed bike as your 12 year old stands there expecting dad to know everything. It is natural for fathers to fear failure, for you can be a good man, a great man, and even a godly man, and still not know much of anything about raising a child. Manoah was a man of God, but his godliness did not give him confidence. He felt a desperate need for instruction. Here is a father to be who is the hungriest father I know of in all the Bible for knowledge and wisdom concerning how to raise his son to fulfill the role God had for his life.**

**His fear of failure was not a defect, but it was an asset that motivated him to seek for answers. His fear of failure was a big factor in his being a successful father. It is not only okay, it is wonderful to feel inadequate and fearful as a father if it moves you, like it did Manoah, to seek for help in raising your child. Notice in verse 12 that he asks the Angel of the Lord what is to be the role for the boy's life and work. Here's a father that recognizes that he plays a major role in what his sons future will be. He wanted to know what to do to fulfill God's will for his son.**

**In the history of the Presidents of the U. S. we have the unique record of a father who prayed and labored, and made many sacrifices for the sake of his son that he might rise to a place of importance. On the night of Aug. 2, 1923 this father woke his son in the night to inform him that President Warren Harding had died and that he was to now become the new President. Calvin Coolidge wrote of this event: "My wife and I at once dressed. Before leaving the room I knelt down and, with the same prayer with which I have since approached the altar of the church, asked God to bless the American people and give me power to serve them."**

**He at once examined the Constitution and discovered that his**

**father as a notary republic was qualified to administer the oath of office. And so in a small farm house room lit with a flickering kerosene lamp with only his wife and a senator Dole, who happened to be only a few miles away, Calvin Coolidge was sworn in as President of the United States by his father. He wrote, "I do not know of any other case in history where a father has administered to his son the qualifying oath of office which made him the chief magistrate of a nation." He was a unique father indeed, and he died 3 years later with his son in office. There are parallels with Manoah, for he was the key person who prepared Samson for his role as leader of Israel. If you read the whole story, you see the personal interest Manoah showed in Samson all through his life. He also died while Samson was in office. Judges 16:31 says that after Samson led Israel for 20 years he was brought back and buried in the tomb of Manoah his father.**

**Here is one of the great father-son stories of history. As a sidelight it is of interest to note that in that same verse of 16:31 that Samson had brothers, and so once there was a breakthrough Manoah and his wife had a good size family. Fear in moderation is a motivation that helps fathers become what God wants them to be. Fathers should fear they will not know how to raise their children right. This motivates them to read, listen, and seek for wisdom to do so.**

**Almost all fathers fail to praise their children enough. We tend to be the disciplinarians and so we develop the eagle eye for what they do wrong, and we neglect seeing what they do right. How often do you catch your children doing something right and then reward them with praise? If you seldom catch them doing something right, you will all too often catch them doing something wrong. We do not have a record of how Manoah raised Samson, but we know Samson was never to drink alcohol of any kind, and so Manoah had to be an example to his son.**

**I read a true but terrible story of a father who had to witness the scene of his daughter's death in car accident in which she had been driving after drinking. He was so angry that he wanted to kill the person who gave his daughter alcohol.**

**When he got home he went to get a drink himself and found a note from his daughter instead of his bottle. It said, "I know you would want me to have a good time tonight daddy, so I borrowed your bottle." The do what I say and not what I do formula is not very effective. Your children will become what you are, and not what you say. Manoaah's fear of failure to raise his son properly made him become the example that his son needed.**

**Ten thousand young people die each year in alcohol related accidents, and many thousands more take their lives because of alcohol. These terrible statistics can be traced to the fact that too many fathers do not have enough fear of failure in raising their children. Manoaah was no perfect father, and his son was far from a perfect son. He was a major problem to his parents and his God, but the fact is, he did fulfill his major purpose in God's plan because he had a father who cared desperately that he fulfill that plan. His fear of failure made him more successful as a father. Next we see that he had to face the most dreaded fear of all fathers-**

## **II. THE FEAR OF FREEDOM.**

**I do not know how strong Samson was as a boy. Maybe he was taking Manoaah down in arm wrestling when he was only 4. But the real problems began when Samson became old enough to make his own decisions about life. This is really scary when children come to the age of freedom, and you loose control over their lives. The best of fathers face this with fear, for their sons and daughters are then free to make the biggest mistakes of their lives.**

**Samson had excellent parents and good godly training, but we read in chapter 14 that he impulsively fell in love with a young Philistine woman, and he wanted her for his wife. They tried to reason with him and point out all the young girls among his own people, and how foolish it was to seek a mate among the uncircumcised Philistines, but it was all in vain. He wanted this girl and no one else. Fathers and mothers have to endure this kind of scene over and over as their children fall in love with people they would not choose. Seldom can a father accept right away the free choices of his children to marry people that seem to be unfit for their child's mate.**

**R. G. Le Torneau in his famous autobiography God Runs My Business told of how his father was opposed to his getting involved with Evelyn Peterson. They met in Sunday School and liked each other. His father came right out and said, "Look here, my lad, that girl is not for you." Her father was equally opposed to the relationship. After several years of hassle these two lovebirds took matters into their own hands and eloped. They went to Mexico and got married. Their fathers tried to get the marriage annulled, but they could not do so, for it was perfectly legal. It took 6 years before there was reconciliation.**

**Robert and Evelyn went on to have 5 boys and 1 girl. One of their boys died at 4 months, and another as a young man. But their family made one of the biggest impacts on American Christianity of any family in our history, and the impact goes on yet today. The point is, fathers can be totally opposed to the free choices of their children, but it is wise to see that once a free choice is made, parents need to cooperate with their children, for it could be God's will even if it seems like a mistake to you. That is what chapter 14 says of Samson's seemingly stupid choice for a wife. God willed it for judgment on the Philistines. Manoah hated it, but we see him going**

**with Samson and cooperating in the decision.**

**I have known of Christian fathers who have rejected their child for marrying someone they did not approve of. I cannot see any biblical basis for this. The Christian father always has an obligation to love his child and work with them to bring good out of any situation. It is frightening that a child has the freedom to choose to follow a foolish path in life. It is terrible that a father has to give up control and let them be free to do so. A child can use their freedom to do all sorts of stupid and sinful things, but a wise father will not let his fear of freedom make him forget that he also has freedom as to how he will respond to choices he feels are foolish. God chose to respond to the foolish use of freedom by His children by providing a way for them to be forgiven and restored to His fellowship.**

**Manoah choose to respond to Samson's unwise choice by maintaining fellowship with him, and 14:10 says that he went down to see the woman. He was open to cooperation even though he did not like what was happening. Many parents face this choice. To fight the free choice of their children, or to cooperate to try and make the best out of a situation they do not approve of. This is the wise way, for it keeps the door open to let God work for good even in the most negative settings. Parents need to remember that when a child makes a bad decision they are still free to make other good decisions.**

**Chapter 14 reveals that Samson was a very thoughtful and caring son even as they traveled to see the woman he wanted to foolishly marry. He scooped honey out of the caress of a lion and shared it with his parents. There was a good and harmonious relationship even though Samson was doing what they hated. Manoah was a father who did not demand one hundred per cent to be pleased with his son. Samson made some bad choices with his freedom, but he also made some good ones, and Manoah was pleased with the good ones.**



**Mark Giorgino tells of the father who reminded his son of the best Father's Day gift he ever gave him. It was when the son was 10 years old and his father was in the store. The son picked up some cigars and stuffed them in his pocket. The father said, "I knew you had no money and I felt bad when I realized you were going to run out of the store without paying. But then I saw you pull out the cigars and put them back. The next day you stayed out playing all day because you had no gift for Father's Day. You thought I would be hurt, but you were wrong. When you put those cigars back and decided not to steal, you gave me the best present I ever received from you.**

**Freedom is a fearful thing, but it is also the most delightful thing, for it is by freedom that good is chosen as well as evil. Samson made some bad choices in life, but he also made some good ones that accomplished God's purpose in Israel. A good father may fear the freedom of his children, but he should also treasure it and keep in a good relationship with his children so that their freedom can always be a potential asset as well as a liability. The Prodigal's father never shut the door to his foolish son, even though he used his freedom for folly. The result was that the Prodigal also used his freedom to come home and make good choices that led to happiness for both father and son.**

**Conrad Hilton, the multimillionaire of Hilton Hotel fame, tells in his autobiography of over sleeping one morning and waking up to hear his father saying to his mother, "Mary, I do not know what will become of Connie. I'm afraid he will never amount to anything. He'll sleep his life away." Hearing of his father's fears concerning him threw a fear into him, and he seldom over slept again for the rest of his life. He learned to enjoy work like his father did. It took him some years, but he came to the point where he understood his father's concern for him that often made him resentful. But he did come to**

**that point, and that is why fathers and sons need to be like Manoah and Samson. They need to agree to disagree where they differ, and not let the lines of communication go dead.**

**People who want one hundred per cent or nothing will usually get nothing. They expect more than God does. They have over reacted to the fear of failure and the fear of freedom. They refuse to accept the reality of failure and freedom, and the result is they guarantee the very things they most dread. Manoah gives us a wiser example. He feared failure and freedom like all fathers, but he faced his fears and decided that no matter how real they were he would not let them rob him of his freedom to go on relating to his son in love, no matter what. The result was that Manoah and Samson were a father and son team who lived together and lie buried together-united in life and in death, and this in spite of differences and a father's fears.**

#### **4. A SUPPORTIVE FATHER Based on Judges 13:1-14, 24**

**Tal Bonham writes about how one night he slipped a poster under the doors of each of his two teenage sons. The poster said-**

**Attention teenagers!  
If you are tired of being hassled by  
Unreasonable parents,  
Now is the time for action!  
Leave home and pay your own way  
While you still know everything.**

**His boys got the message, and they all had a good laugh. It is a common fantasy of parents, however, to dream of the day when the**

**kids are all grown up and able to leave the home and make it on their own. Bonham tells of finding the essay on When The Kids Finally Leave Home. He does not know the original author, but he added some of his own thoughts, and this is what he wrote: "Some day when the kids finally leave home, things are going to be a lot different around our house. The garage won't be cluttered with bicycles and garbage bags on their way to trash cans. I'll be able to park both cars in just the right places and never again stumble over skateboards, a bag of rabbit food, and egg shells from the garbage bags that someone forgot to tie."**

**"Some day when the kids finally leave home the kitchen will be incredibly neat. The sink will stay free of dirty dishes. The garbage disposal won't get clogged up with rubber bands, paper clips, or a stray spoon. The refrigerator won't be crowded with 4 cartons of milk-all opened and half used. We won't lose the tops of jelly jars or catsup bottles anymore. The honey will stay inside the container, and no one will wonder again what's going to explode next in the microwave oven." He goes on like this for 8 more paragraphs and ends up feeling lonely for the kids who have finally left home.**

**In a nut shell the essay is saying that you can't live with them, and you can't live without them. Kids have always been costly to raise, and not just in money, but in nervous energy. Imagine what it must have been like to raise Samson, who was a giant size Dennis the Menace. Manoah, the father of Samson, was a typical father even though he had the most non-typical son in the Old Testament. Samson was the strongest man in history, and so I suppose he was taking poor Manoah down in arm wrestling by the time he was 6 or 7. I remember that is when I realized I was not young anymore when my son could take me in arm wrestling. Before that I was the big daddy and sons were merely kids to play with. But when they get stronger than you, you know they are no longer kids.**

**I don't know when this happened to Manoah, but it would be a shock to have a pre-teen beat you. So Manoah had a unique child who was one of a kind when it came to strength. But he had all the typical battles of the typical father that we want to examine for it can be a comfort and a challenge to see the battles he faces in fatherhood. His first battle was the battle of-**

## **I. INFERTILITY.**

**This is a common battle in the Bible and in our contemporary world. All of the fathers of Israel had this battle-Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Millions of men today have a battle in becoming fathers because of their own infertility, or that of their wives. The Bible deals with this problem a lot so we can be aware and sympathetic with those who long to be mothers and fathers, but who cannot because their bodies do not function normally. In Bible times there were no fertility drugs, and so all that people could do was to pray that God would pave the way to parenthood.**

**Getting from being a non-father to becoming a father was often the hardest battle, and it still is. I have 2 grandchildren who are the result of a long and frustrating battle with the aid of experts. Fatherhood and motherhood are not always easy, but are the results of long and agonizing battles. It is important that we recognize this and not assume that anyone can become a parent if they so choose. Manoah's wife was sterile, and he never would have been a father but by the grace of God. Fatherhood is a gift of God. Samson himself never received this gift. He had a wife briefly, and he had a number of lovers, but there is no record of any child. He is one of the greats of faith in Heb. 11, but never a father. This is a comforting message to those who never become fathers, because it means they can still be great people of faith. The second battle he had was more universal. It is the battle of-**

## **II. INFERIORITY.**

**As soon as he got the word that he was to be a father he went to God with a prayer of passion in verse 8. "O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born." The thought of the responsibility of raising a son made Manoah feel like a man trying to thread a needle while wearing boxing gloves. He didn't have a clue on what to do as a father. He felt totally inadequate and inferior. He knew that babies come without a set of instructions, and so he is begging God to give him some guidance before the baby comes. Here is your typical father who feels totally unprepared for the task of being a father.**

**Fathers feel this inferiority more than mothers because they do not have any conspicuous natural relationship to the child. Mom has the built in breast- feeding, and so she has the natural hugging and cuddling instinct to begin with, but poor dad has to learn everything from scratch, and so his first prayer is HELP! There is good reason for the feeling of inferiority, for the fact is, nobody knows for sure how to be the ideal father. There are some basics to have a shot at it, but anything is possible in a world of free-willed beings like we are. The Bible reveals every possibility in the genealogy of Jesus in Matt. 1:7-8.**

- 1. Rehoboam the father of Adijah. This is a bad father begetting a bad son.**
- 2. Abijah begat Asa. This is a bad father begetting a good son.**
- 3. Asa begat Jehoshaphat. This is a good father begetting a good son.**
- 4. Jehoshaphat begat Joram. This is a good father begetting a bad son.**

**The point is that fathers can do all that is right and their sons can turn out to be rebels. Or they can do all that is wrong and their sons**

can turn out to be saints. There is no necessary connection between what a person is and how his parents did at parenting. Dr. Dobson stresses this over and over because he sees so much unnecessary guilt in parents with rebel children, and a lot of pride in others do not deserve it, for they were no better parents than those with the rebels.

The father of the Prodigal Son was an ideal father, for he represented God. But the fact is, neither of his boys earned any merit badges for being great sons. Each was worse than the other in different areas of life, but dad loved them both. This is the bottom line, and Manoah learned this key lesson. He loved Samson even though he did not always agree or approve of his behavior. God never did send the angel back to give him a plan on how to raise his son, but he did become a good father. Samson was something of a rebel, but he always came to dad for help. He loved and respected his father and wanted his approval even when he was going to marry a Philistine girl. This incident leads us to look at the third battle Manoah fought.

### **III. INCAPABILITY.**

That is the inability to know what is best for your child because you don't know what God's plan is for their life. In chapter 14 Samson comes to dad and mom telling them he has to have this Philistine girl for his wife, and he wants their help. They, of course, are as shocked as you would be if your son came home and announced that he wanted to marry a Hindu Gypsy. In verse 3 they try to argue him out of this foolishness. They say, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?"

All parents assume they know what is the best type of mate for their children, and often they are right, but in this case God had a

special plan for Samson, and he wanted this marriage to be arranged. In verse 4 we read, "His parents did not know that this was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines." God has plans for children that dads are incapable of knowing, and the result is that dads often fight the will of God for their children. Monoah did for a while, but he decided to go along with Samson's wishes when he could not be talked out of it.

This is a very touchy area of fatherhood. How do you know when to give in to a child's independence and let them choose their own direction? This is very hard for fathers to do, and many of a father has failed here because of their incapability of understanding that God's plan differs from their own dreams. Take the father of Leslie Fallan for example. He is the wealthy owner of a West Coast drugstore chain. When his daughter Leslie chose to earn a master's degree in art history he was furious. "What a waste," he shouted at her. "What money is there in that?" She began to write articles about Los Angeles opera, ballet, and symphony. She finally got a by-line on the front page of the Times. She was ecstatic and phoned her father to share the good news. All he could ask her was, "How much did they pay you?"

Free-lance writers do not get much, but she was thrilled to get this front- page scoop. Her father's obsessions with money as the only thing that mattered caused her to hang up and never call him again. Leslie went on to write 4 books, hundreds of articles, and she became a success in her chosen field. But she has never talked to her father since that day of his rejection of her choice of professions. His failure to be supportive made him a failure as a father. This kind of foolishness is more common than you would ever dream. The world is filled with successful people who have no relationship with their father because dad did not like their choice. Manoah did not like Samson's choice either, but he was wise enough not to ruin their

relationship over it.

**Our heavenly Father does not slam the door on us and say to never return if you are going to make that stupid decision. He keeps the door open always no matter how many foolish things we choose, for He is ready at all time to welcome the Prodigal home and celebrate that return. God does not say, as so many fathers do, choose my way or we are through. The father loved both the Prodigal Son and the self-righteous elder son. They were both failures as persons, and they made terrible choices, but dad never shut the door on either of them. That is being a successful father. It is being one who loves his kids no matter how many choices they make that he does not like. Edgar Guest has always been one of my favorite poets, but sometimes poetry can be very superficial, as in the case of his poem on the successful father. It is true and relevant to millions, but it assumes that if your child is not in an honored place that you are not successful.**

**"Old man Green you've never heard of.  
Papers never used a word of  
Him or anything he did.  
Seems as though his light was hid-  
Just a carpenter who made  
Odds and ends and liked his trade.**

**But somehow his wife and he  
Managed it most faithfully  
And with what small sum he earned  
Many things his children learned.  
"Those Green boys," the teachers said,  
"Have the stuff to get ahead."**

**That is all there is to tell,**



**Boys and girls are doing well.  
Each with courage and with grace  
Fills in life and honored place.  
This the old man's praise, if needed,  
"As a father he succeeded."**

**The fact is, the father of the Prodigal and elder son was a great success, as was Manoah, because they loved their sons when they were not in honored places, but despised places, and making choices that were not approved. Any dad can love his kids when they are choosing just what he desires that they choose. The real heroes are those fathers who go on loving and helping their children when they are making, what is to them, all the wrong choices.**

**In chapter 14 we are told that Manoah went with Samson to see the girl he chose. He did not say, "Go ahead if you must and marry this Gentile dog, but don't expect me to ever gaze on her face." I know Christian fathers who have said this kind of thing, and they cut themselves off from their children and grandchildren. Somewhere they got the idea that fathers are people who get their own way or they don't play the game. This is not wise fatherhood. When Manoah could not persuade Samson to change his mind he said, "Okay, I'll support you in your choice and help you make it work." Bad choices can still work out if people love and cooperate. Many marriage fail because the family does all it can to fulfill their own prophecy that it won't work.**

**Manoah said, "I don't like it, but I'll help my son make the best of his choice." Here we see the ability of a father to be tender and loving even if he is incapable of understanding the plan of God. This is an example of love never failing. You cannot go wrong if you love, even if you don't like and don't understand what is going on. Fathers can be just as compassionate as mothers. Mothers tend to get all the**

**credit for tender mercy, but dads can match it if they chose.**

**President Franklin Roosevelt had a son named Elliot who often provoked his parents to acts of judgment. He wrote of one such occasion: "I remember when I did get punished. Mother use to take me to father's study, sit me down, and say, 'Franklin, this has gone far enough. You have to teach Elliot a lesson.'**

**After mother left, father would instruct me to yell while he beat the daylights out of his desk with a ruler. Soon mother, hearing my anguished cries, would run back in, begging father to stop." Here was a case where dad was merciful on a level that was even ahead of the mother.**

**Manoah was incapable of making things go his way. He was incapable of changing Samson's mind. He was incapable of knowing the will of God in this unusual situation. But the one thing he was not incapable of was the choosing to love, and this is the choice he made. That is what makes him a good and successful father. Every father is incapable in many ways, but every father is also capable of making the best choice of loving their children regardless of their choices. The battle of fatherhood never changes. Here is a description of children: "Children now love luxury, they have bad manners, contempt for authority, they show disrespect for elders and love to chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants not slaves of the household. They no longer rise when an elder enters a room, they contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up their food at the table, cross their legs and tyrannize their teachers."**

**This is not a report from your local PTA, but it is the reported complaint of Socrates in 400 B. C. The battle of fatherhood has always been the same. God has had to love disobedient children from the beginning because that is the only kind there was to love. It has**

**never been different, and never will be until the new heaven and new earth. So earthly fathers need to learn to love unlovely children to be God-like fathers. Samson made a lot of mistakes, and though he was a hero, he was also a moral failure, and sometimes downright stupid. But he had a father who never forsook him, but let him know that he was loved and supported. That is what every child needs and deserves from a father.**

**One of the things that has impressed me is the number of people who have told me of the long-range impact on their lives of negative remarks they received as a child. One told of being compared with her sister. "That is the pretty one," they said as they pointed to the sister. This woman felt inferior the rest of her life because of that remark. Every adult needs to recognize that children take words seriously, and you may be kidding and mean nothing by it, but if you say something negative about a child it can influence them for life. Dads especially need to be positive in the words they say to and about their children. God is to be our example. He did not say a lot to Jesus when He was on earth in the flesh, but what He did say was always positive and supportive. At His baptism the heavens opened and a voice said, "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." Then on the Mount of Transfiguration God spoke from the cloud, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him."**

**Jesus received praise and approval from His Father in heaven. This is a gift you cannot buy. John Drescher, one of the greatest authors of the 20th century, says that if he could go back and raise his children over he would be more free to express words of praise and appreciation. Children need to be scolded too, but few parents give adequate praise for the good behavior of children. Drescher writes, "Probably no other thing encourages a child to love life, to seek accomplishment, and to gain confidence more than proper, sincere praise." He says another thing that fits Manoah. Samson always saw**

**his father and mother united and never divided. Drescher says that the number one thing a child needs to see is that dad loves mom. This gives a child a sense of security and stability they can gain in no other way. The best training you can give your child as a father is letting them see how much you love their mother. Your kindness and thoughtfulness to her will have a greater impact on them than anything else you do.**

**Samson is not portrayed as the best son, but his father is portrayed as a good father. In spite of his inferiority and incapability he loved Samson's mother, and he loved his son. He gave him his support, and we see that the key to being a successful father is simply being a supportive father.**

## **5. FATHER AND DAUGHTER Based on Esther 2:5-11**

**George Barnell, a Jew living in North Carolina, back in 1871 fathered one of the most unusual daughters in Americans history. Jane Barnell grew up to become the famous Lady Olga, the bearded lady of the circus. She had a thick beard hanging 13 and a half inches, and also a large mustache. The beard started to grow when she was 2 and at 4 she was being displayed, and 65 years later she was still going strong.**

**When Jane was a toddler, and her father was out of town on business, her mother took her to the Great Orient Family Circus, and came home without her. When the father returned home he was frantic. He appealed to the police, and North Carolina and surrounding states were scoured, but the circus and Jane had vanished. They had gone to Europe. It was several years later in a**

**Berlin orphanage that the father finally found her, and brought her back to the United States. She grew to adulthood on a farm where she shaved just like the young men. At 21 she was persuaded to let her beard grow and enter the circus. She did, and spent the rest of her life traveling the world as an exhibit to the curious.**

**The story of Mordecai and Esther is also a story of a Jewish father and daughter, but with this distinction that Esther was as unusually feminine as Jane was unusually masculine. Esther was one of the most beautiful girls that ever lived. She was the Miss Universe of her day. She was the most beautiful girl in the Persian Empire, which included most of the known world.**

**Our focus on this Father's Day is not upon Esther, however, but upon Mordecai. A contemporary bitter male said, "The only thoroughly masculine domain not yet invaded by women is growing a mustache." He obviously never saw Lady Olga, or the many other bearded ladies of history. The real uninvaded domain of masculinity is fatherhood. No woman can beat a man at this role, for no matter how good she is with children, she is always a good mother, and not a good father.**

**Mordecai was an excellent father even though there is no record of his having any children of his own. Esther was his adopted daughter. We have established in a different message that you do not have to give birth to a child to be a good mother. The same holds true for being a father, and Mordecai is proof of this. Joseph was also a good father to Jesus, even though he did not actually father Him in the sense that He was from his seed. That is the easiest part of fatherhood. The real challenge is to so love a child that it becomes a mature and balanced adult with a solid foundation of spiritual principles to guide them through life. Mordecai was this kind of father to Esther.**

**Most all of the Bible accounts of fathers are those who deal with fathers and sons. Here we have a rare case of a father and daughter combination. And what a combination they were! They saved Israel from destruction, and they changed the course of history. It is of interest to note the balance of the Bible where we see any combination of people can be used of God to accomplish His purpose. In the New Testament it is Mary the mother and Jesus the Son, with the father only faintly in the picture. Here in the Old Testament we see Mordecai the father and Esther the daughter, with the mother not in the picture at all. God can, and does, use any combination, for any of them can be winners.**

**It is important to see this, for life is complex and uncertain. There are all kinds of ideals that are best, but the fact is, they are not attained by millions. I don't know why Mary had to raise her family without Joseph, nor why Mordecai had to raise Esther without his wife. Nor do I know why there are so many other less than ideal family situations. All I know is that there is good news, for any of these less than ideal situations can be used of God for His glory, and for His purpose, and life can be full of blessings. Let's look at some examples of how Mordecai was a successful father in a less than ideal situation. He gave to Esther three things that made her a successful daughter, and him a successful father. First of all he gave her-**

## **I. AID IN ADOPTION.**

**Esther was of a minority race, in a foreign land, and a pagan culture, plus she was an adopted child. Adoption can be less than the ideal simply because there are complications in the minds of adopted children. They tend to struggle with insecurity, and their self-esteem. The father is in danger of trying to protect them so much that they become over dependent. On the other hand, to so push them into independence that they feel rejected and unloved. It is a tough job**

**maintaining just the right balance so an adopted child can feel adequately loved, and still press on to be mature and independent. This, of course, is the same battle all fathers have, but with an adopted child there is an added complexity. Blessed is the father who can provide the aid that is needed.**

**I have not known many adopted children, but the few I have known have all struggled to some degree with their self-image. It takes a wise father to help them see and feel that they are just as loved, and just as valuable, as their own seed. Mordecia clearly succeeded with Esther, for she was a loving daughter, and one who could be fully independent of Mordeica. She could listen and follow his guidance, and was as beautiful within as she was on the outside.**

**This is not to say that the father of an adopted child not turning out well is a poor father. Some of the finest fathers fail in attempting to reform a rebel. Andrew Jackson as President of the United States had to write this letter to his adopted son Andrew Jr. He was in trouble already at age 14, and by 25 he was a heavy drinker and deeply in debt. He wrote this on April 14, 1835.**

**"I now address you with the fondness of a father's heart. How care then you ought to be to shun all bad company, or to engage in any dissipation whatever and particularly intoxication. When I reflect on the fate of your cousin Savern, reduced to the contempt of all by his brutal intemperance I shutter when I see any appearance of it in any branch of our connection."**

**When General Jackson died he was 24 thousand dollars in debt due to his rebellious unheeding son. I do not believe he was a bad father. Mordecai may have failed with this son also. All I am saying is, that in a less than ideal situation he did succeed with Esther. She**

**adapted to a life that was full of tragedy and sorrow as her people were carried away captive, and her parents were taken in death. We are not told if they died from violence or natural causes, but either way she was left an orphan in a foreign land. Mordecai aided her in adapting to her circumstances, and she became a beautiful well-rounded person. It would have been easy to become bitter and hateful toward the Persians. Mordecai had to teach her not to hate the Gentiles she lived among, and she did adapt and learn to love them. The second thing we see that Mordecai did for her is that he taught her the-**

## **II. ACCEPTANCE OF AUTHORITY.**

**Esther became the Queen, and she had more power in the snap of her finger than Mordecai had in his whole life. He was nobody in terms of real power, and yet Esther obeyed his authority, and did not reveal that she was a Jew. Her loyalty to her father's authority is a key factor in God's providential plan to save the Jewish race. Had Mordecai failed to teach Esther to accept authority, and to be loyal to authority, the whole plan of God would not have worked out as it did.**

**One of the greatest tragedies of life is a father who does not win respect for his authority from his children. It is a recognized fact that a major cause of the breakdown of the American family is the loss of authority by dads. A little girl inquired, "Mommy, if the stork brings babies; if Santa brings our presents; if the Lord gives us our daily bread, and Uncle Sam our social security, what is daddy good for."**

**It is no joke when kids really feel this way. Colonel Farley, founder of Boy's Ranch says 90% of the youth who come to him come from homes where there was little or no influence of the father. Between 80 and 90% of the boys in Boy's Town come from the same**



**type of home. Judge Leibowitz of Brooklyn's highest criminal court has concluded that the number one factor in criminality is failure of the father's role.**

**If a father does not influence his child to respect authority, the opposite is what will take place, and they will reject authority. They will tend to become problem makers in society. Diogenes the Greek was said to have struck the father when the son swore. He was illustrating the direct influence of the father on the son. Weak influence of fathers is a major cause of weak people in all areas of life. Studies show that 94% of veterans under treatment or psychiatric reasons experienced father rejection.**

**We need to balance out what we are saying here by looking at the total picture revealed by the book of Esther. Strong influence of fathers is not necessarily good either. There is another father in this book by the name of Haman, who is the enemy of Mordecai. The whole book is like a Hatfields and Macoys type story, for it is about two fathers and their children who are determined to eliminate each other from the map of Persia.**

**Haman had all of the advantages. He had 10 sons, and Mordecai had only one daughter. Haman had position and power, and all Mordecai had was hope in the providence of God. The point I want to make here is that Haman was basically a strong father. This book reveals that he had a powerful influence on his sons, and they did respect his authority. They joined him in his battle of bigotry, and gave their lives because of their loyalty. Because evil fathers can teach their children good principles, we need to rise above the secular level to see a Christian father's duty. Doubtless, there are fathers in the Mafia, and other underworld organizations, who teach their children strong respect for authority, and they become loyal people to the cause of crime. You can't even be good at being bad without**

**respect for authority.**

**We need to see, therefore, that no father has done his job well until his child respects the highest authority, which is the authority of God. Haman failed because his sons obeyed only human authority, and they were loyal to folly that was contrary to God's will. Mordecai taught Esther to respect his authority also, but his authority was based on his obedience to God's authority. We see this in chapter 4 where Esther begins to waver in her obedience to his authority. He responds by lifting her sights to a higher level, and by getting her to focus on the providence of God. In 4:14 Mordecai says, "For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"**

**Esther was moved by this to go ahead and risk her life trusting in the providence of God. The lesson is clear: No father can be the final authority, for all fathers fall short of the glory of God. Only those fathers who give their children an ultimate foundation can be called good fathers in the biblical sense. A good father is a fallible father with faith in the infallible Father in heaven, and he passes on this faith to his children. This means a good father does not need to be uptight about his weaknesses and failures, for he does not have to pretend he is perfect and infallible. The respect for his authority is not based on its infallibility, but on his respect for the authority of God.**

**A Christian father needs to be honest about his own mistakes, and not try to pretend that he is always right. Joseph Bayly, the popular Christian author, has raised 7 children. He has punished them when they were innocent. He has failed to tell them he is sorry. He has inflicted pain by his ignorance. He sat one of this little boys on a log in the woods to rest. He had short pants on and there was poison ivy**

**all around the log. You can imagine the fun dad had trying to be innocent and intelligent after that. Bayly says there is no escape from guilt. He had to travel so much when his little girl was small that when he came home she would not recognize him when he wanted to hold her. The point is, he did not need to fear that his failures would cause his 7 year old to be out pushing sweet old ladies in front of cement mixers. They were taught that human authority is to be respected in so far as it conformed to God's authority, as revealed in His Word. this is the goal of all who would be truly successful fathers. The final value we see imparted by this first rate father is-**

### **III. ABUNDANCE OF ATTENTION.**

**Note verse 11 where the text says that every day Mordecai checked on Esther to see how she was doing. Not every weekend, or every month, but every day. She is a married woman, and she is the Queen of the Persian Empire, yet Mordecai does not let a day go by without letting her know he is concerned. This gives us a strong hint as to the kind of father he was. He was an available father. In our busy world nobody seems to have enough time to do all that should be done, and the result is fathers are often not available to their children.**

**Children , by their very nature, are not interested in doing what matters for even the long run, let alone eternity. They specialize in the trivial and the transient. In other words, kids love to do what is a waste of time. That is contrary to adult intelligence. We cannot waster time, and so we are always trying to make all time count. The fact is, it is very biblical, for we are told to redeem the time. The problem is that we become legalists, and we forget that Jesus also taught we must become as little children. There is a time to waste time. That is, we must learn to enjoy doing things like children love, which are very momentary fun as an end in itself.**

**I must confess that I have struggled with this for years, and even as I preach it, I do not always practice it. I am conditioned by the philosophy that we must try to kill two birds with one stone, and make every moment count. Don't waste time, or time will waste you. I still believe these things, but more and more I realize that it is an error to fail to balance this thinking with a childlike love for the enjoyment of the present. Jesus had time in His short life, and even shorter ministry, to enjoy living. He had times of fun, fellowship, laughter and song. He took time out from healing and preaching to go fishing. We always miss the boat when we take our eyes off Jesus, and push any truth to an extreme.**

**This comes home to you when you read that Boswell, the famous biographer of Samuel Johnson, who said he would never forget the day his father took time out of his busy schedule to take him fishing. It is a highlight of his life, and he learned so much. Boswell's father kept a diary, and when he died it was found, and that day that meant so much to his son had this entry in it. "Gone fishing today with my son; a day wasted."**

**Maybe it was wasted in the sense that he got nothing done, but if getting nothing done is what it takes to be available to your child, and make them feel your attention and care, then nothing is what needs to be done. This is not the kind of nothing that Aristotle defines when he said that nothing is what rocks dream of. That is really nothing, but the nothing of wasting time with your child is really something. It is an investment in the future. A father who cares enough to waste time for his child's sake will produce a child who will redeem the time for God's sake.**

**Availability is the key to being a good dad. One daughter tells of an interesting thing her father did as she was growing up, and he was her only parent. When she started school he gave her a dime and**

said, "Patty, I want you always to keep this dime in your purse. Anytime you need me, you call the plant. Tell them you want to talk to your dad, and I guarantee they will let you right through." Many years later she wrote, "There is no way I could tell you what that ten cent piece from my father meant. Even when I didn't need him, just to know I had it in my purse made me feel secure." Little things can help your child feel secure because they give them that sense of access to your care and concern.

This is what Mordecai did for Esther. He made it clear that he was always available. So often you read of a father, or see one playing the role on television, who gets a phone call for a business obligation just as the family is ready to go on vacation. So often they choose the business obligation rather than the family obligation, and the family feels that they are always secondary. Mordecai may have had many other things to do, but he made contact every day with Esther. She knew he was always available. He wanted to know how she was. A father needs to be informed about his children. When dad knows what is going on in the life of his child, that child feels loved. A study found that a high percentage of children do not even know what their father does for a living. This indicates very poor communication between fathers and children. Too many fathers feel they cannot waste time by being available to their children.

A group of 300 7th and 8th graders kept accurate records of just how much time dad spent with them over a two week period. The average came out to only 7 and a half minutes per week. Many only saw their father at the supper table, and many did not see him at all for days at a time. One of the best gifts any dad can give a child is what Mordecai gave to Esther. It is sometime every day showing them attention. Mordecai did it for his daughter who was a grown woman. How much more is it needed for those still in childhood. May God help us as fathers to see the wisdom of Mordecai, and make

**sure our children feel that we are available to them on a regular basis. This is the key to being the father our children need.**

## **6. A FULL TIME FATHER Based on Job 1:1-5**

**A Berlin policeman was crossing the street when a robber raced by him with an angry store manager in hot pursuit. To the surprise of hundreds of on lookers the policeman didn't make a move. The robber got away and the police department was flooded with calls from indignant citizens. When the policeman was called before his superiors he explained his actions, or rather his lack of action. When the robber ran passed him he had only 3 minutes of duty remaining that day. He knew he couldn't capture and arrest the man in that short of time, and so he didn't even try. The officials were not impressed with his logic, but they did respect his right to be a clock-watcher. They gave him a 7 weeks suspension in jail where he could watch it all he wished.**

**There are many jobs you can leave, but jobs, which involve you in moral issues and services to human need, are almost always full time jobs. Fighting crime does not consume all of your time if you are a policeman, but you can never be indifferent to time and be a good policeman. Fighting disease does not take all of a doctor's time, but if he is a good doctor he will never be indifferent to disease. A teacher cannot be always overcoming ignorance, but a good teacher is ever concerned about ways of doing so. We could go on with other professions, but the point we are making is that some jobs are not mere appendages to life, but are a very way of life. Some jobs are just ways of making a living, but others are ways of living in themselves.**

**Fatherhood is one of these fulltime jobs that become a way of life. It is not a way of making a living, but a living so as to make a way. That is, a way for children to realize the full potential of all God has made them to be. Adam Reiter wrote-**

**You got t' keep a-workin at th' job of bein' Dad.  
You'll find its most th' stiffest task, y' prob'ly ever had.  
You got t' play th' game yourself, an' not jest point th' way.  
T' kids when they're a-learnin' how t' live er else they'll stray.  
There ain't no lay-offs an' no strikes, an' you can't up an' quit.  
Y' sign up for a lifetime job. Y's got to do yer bit.**

**Modern studies reveal that many, if not most, of the problems of youth are due to part time fathers in the American home. The kind of woman a girl becomes, and the kind of man a boy becomes depends in large measure of their father image. Some go so far as to say that the most important thing a mother can do for her children is to guide them in loving and respecting their father. This is no easy task if the father himself is not impressed with his responsibility as a father. This does not mean that all the father's time is consumed with his children. But it does mean that his whole way of life must involve the interest of his children. Children are to the father what crime prevention is to be policeman; health is to the doctor, and what learning is to the teacher. A full time father is one whose children become a part of his way of life.**

**Job was that kind of a father. He is not only a great example of faithfulness in suffering, but he is an ideal full time father. Often the two go together-fatherhood and suffering. It often takes the patience of Job to tolerate children. None of us can complain, however, in comparison to Job. He had 7 boys and 3 girls. Full time fatherhood does not mean we need to be literally having children all the time. Ten was an ideal number in Job's day, but in our day it would be**

**consider extremism.**

**Job was not only famous he was also very rich. These are two other ways we would have difficulty in imitating him. Job had none of the problems that come from lack of resources. He represents a father of the upper class, and so he had different problems than most of us do. Job had need of nothing and so we can sympathize with his ten children. It is hard enough to buy father's anything today, and so I can't imagine what frustration it was back then. Being wealthy as they were, however, it may not have been a problem. The reason it is a problem today is that it is hard to find anything that is both nice and cheap at the time. An unknown poet said it this way:**

**On Father's Day we honor dad  
To give his heart a lift.  
Tis just like Mother's Day, except  
He gets a cheaper gift.**

**I suppose that an account of a modern Job would read, "And he had 7000 ties and 3000 sport shirts." Before we look at what made Job a full time father we want to clear up a popular misconception. People usually think of Job, if they ever think of him at all, as an old man. All the evidence, however, indicates that he was a fairly young father. It is implied that all of his children are yet unmarried, and there are no grandchildren mentioned. When the sufferings of Job are over he is still youthful enough to beget another large family. The book ends by telling us that he lived 140 years, saw his sons have sons, and died an old man full of days. This clearly indicates he is young father as we examine his example. There are two things Job did which made him an ideal father. These two things all of us must do to be good dads.**

**I. HE FACED THE REALISTIC FACTS OF LIFE.**



**The first fact Job faced up to squarely was that his children were sinners. In verse 5 Job says, "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Job was no blind indulgent father who felt his boys were too good to every go wrong. He was a godly man and provided them with everything, and if any kids could ever grow up free of sin, it would be Job's kids. They had the ideal environment, the ideal parents, and everything life could offer. But Job was not so naïve as to think his kids were perfect. The father who feels that his children are in no danger of going wrong is obviously a part time father. He is a father who doesn't know human nature. A wise father assumes that his children can go wrong.**

**Nothing is so pathetic as a parent who is blind to the sins of his children. I have seen parents so blind that even when all the neighbors and the police report to them that their boys are stealing refuse to believe it, and accuse society of persecuting them. These boys, of course, went from bad to worse. They lived like angels at home, but demons at large. Mothers are as guilty as fathers, but fathers ought to know better. A mother has never been a boy, and so she has some excuse for her blindness, but every father has been a boy, and so he has no excuse.**

**Job was a realist, and he knew the weakness of human nature and the power of sin, and the result was that he was a better father. Only those fathers who face up to the dangers their children will encounter will be able to give wise and effective guidance. The father who thinks his children will never go wrong will never bother to warn them, or make provision for their restoration when they fall. We can be thankful that God is no such father. Job was no foolish father. Someone said, "Nearly every man is a firm believer in heredity until his son makes a fool of himself." Job was wise enough to know that the best of sons can make fools of themselves. He did not close his eyes to it, nor was he determined to disown them if they did.**

**Job made provision for dealing with the problem of sin if it should arise, and this is God-like fatherhood. In Job's age the father was the priest of the home. There was no temple, no clergy and no official religious organization. Dad was the priest, the preacher, and the Sunday school teacher. The church and the home were one, and no man could be a good father who was not also a man of God. If the father failed to deal with sin, the children didn't have a chance. Time has changed radically, but this principle never changes. Children with a father who is a spiritual man, and one who helps them deal with the issues of sin and forgiveness have the best chance in life of experiencing God's best. We will look at this more clearly in a few moments.**

**Job not only faced the realistic fact that his children could sin, but also face the realistic fact that he had to risk letting them sin. Every father must take the same risk that God took. As our heavenly Father God risked the chance of sin. He had the power to prevent it, and he could have forced Adam and Eve to do what was right. He has the power to force all of us to do His will, but He is not that kind of a Father. He is a Father who wants children who are righteous, who love Him and obey Him by choice. If God cannot make us good by force, then God forbid that we as earthly fathers think we can do so with our children. Job had more power than all of us put together, but he knew better. He knew that youth was a risky age of life, but that a father has no alternative but to accept the risks. The father who demands that his children live on an adult level and avoid the foolish risks of youth is being unrealistic, and he is courting failure as a father.**

**Youth are youth, and this does not mean that they must do all kinds of terrible things, but it does mean they must have the freedom to choose between folly and wisdom. Job may have thought all the feasts his children were having were foolishness and totally**

unnecessary. He knew they were a risk, and yet he did not forbid them. Many in Job's shoes would have put an end to all that nonsense. All kids every want to do is have fun. That is the complaint of parents in all ages. Youth are fanatics for fun. The fact is, however, that father's who fight it and who fail to recognize the need for fun in youth will not have much fun in being a father. One of the most foolish things we do as fathers is to demand that our children stop acting like children. We are all guilty to some degree, but when we become excessive in this demand we rightly deserve the poets criticism.

What unjust judges fathers are, when in regard to us they hold  
That even in our boyish days we ought in conduct to be old,  
Nor taste at all the very thing that youth and only youth requires,  
They rule us by their present wants, not by their past long-last desires.

A realistic father like Job recognizes that he must take the risk and let his children be children. Fun is not wrong, but it is a good thing that can often lead to wrong. The only way to eliminate the risk is to forbid what is not in itself wrong, but which can lead to it. Job chose to let them have their parties and indulge in their fun, and risk doing wrong. Not all fathers would dare take this risk in our world today, for the dangers are greater than ever, but a father like Job can always risk it because of the second thing he did, which we want to examine. He faced the realistic facts of life and could take the risks involved because-

## **II. HE FURNISHED A REALISTIC FAITH FOR LIFE.**

Job knew he couldn't prevent his children from sinning, but he could prevent them from wanting to. Faith is the answer, and not force. God does not force us to give up sin. He gives us, instead, the

**wisdom to see the superiority of righteousness. This is what Job did for his children, and this makes any man a full time father, for no man can prove to his children that godliness is the greatest unless he is godly himself. A great father must be a godly father.**

**Job was a father who gave his children an example of what godliness was. The very first verse tells us that he was blameless and upright, and he was one who feared God and turned away from evil. It is not only what you do but what you are that makes you a good dad. Job was doing plenty for his children just by being the man of God he was. A father does great disservice to his children when he fails to become the best man he can be before God. That is why ideal fatherhood is such a full time job. Everything you are and do affects what you are as a father.**

**The more you become a man of God the better father you will be. Many point out that even preacher's kids can go bad, and no one can refute that. Preachers do a lot of stupid things in raising children. I know two personally who had sons who committed suicide. Pastors make all the same mistakes as everyone else. They are too strict or too lenient. However, the fact is, that in Who's Who In America there are more children who come from the homes of preachers than any other profession. The statistics do not reveal all the failures, but they do reveal that the majority of children raised in a home where Christ is exalted, and His Word honored, become adults who are strongly motivated to make their lives count for God and man.**

**You can give your children everything, but if you do not furnish them with a realistic faith for life, as Job did for his children, you will have deprived them of life's best gift. Job set before his children an ideal example of godly living. That is what we mean by a realistic faith. It is a faith that works and is not a mere matter of pious words. Few things are more pathetic than a father who tries to force his**

**children to obey moral principles that he does not obey himself. Most children will do what you do and not just what you say. I know of fathers who are disgusted with their children because they lie, cheat, smoke and swear. They are frustrated because they cannot beat it out of them. The problem is that these boys admire their dad, and he does all of these things, and even boasts of his clever lies and deception. His children are only following his bad example. His words are worthless, for they are unreal. What is real is what he does. And unknown poet put it-**

**All in vain is splendid preaching,  
And the noble things we say,  
All our talk is wasted teaching  
If we do not lead the way.  
We can never, by reviewing  
All the sermons on the shelves,  
Keep the younger hands from doing  
What we often do ourselves.**

**Any father who fails to live his faith just as well save his breath. Children imitate what is, and not what ought to be. Children of bad fathers can still find good examples of faith to follow, but every father should want to be that ideal for his own children. A full time father is one who is aware that all he is and all is becoming involves his children, for what he is greatly influences them. Earl Rudisill in his book For Fathers Only writes, "When children see their father restrain himself in times of stress, respect their time and projects, stand for the right, and take spiritual and moral principles seriously, they are easily and unconsciously receiving inspiration and direction of the greatest value."**

**The best thing any father can do for his children is to receive Christ as his Savior. If he had done that, the next best thing he can do**

**is to yield to Christ as Lord of his life, and become the best Christian the grace of God can make him. A part time Christian will only be a part time father. A father who only dabbles at practicing his faith will not furnish his children with a realistic faith. If dad is hit and miss, and does not stress loyalty to Christ and the church by serving and giving, you can count on it that the children will be the same. If fathers will be faithful to God, as Job was, they will not only be better men but better fathers, for as full time Christians they will also be full time fathers.**

## **7. THE DUTIES OF DADS Based on Prov. 23:13-28**

**A teacher took her class of young boys and girls to the zoo where they were seeing many animals for the first time. They came to one large enclosed area, and the teacher pointed to the graceful inhabitants and said, "Children, that is what your mother always calls your father." One little guy in disbelief said, "Don't tell me that is a louse!" Sometimes that girl that married dear old dad is not very complimentary, and often times children can be very embarrassing in letting this truth be known.**

**The fact is, fathers are a very abused and degraded class of people. Adlai Stevenson in a speech before the National Father's Day committee in 1961 said, "There was a time when father amounted to something in the United States..... In recent years, however, especially since World War II, father has come upon sorry times. He is the butt of the comic strips; he is the boob of the radio and TV serials; and the favorite stooge of all our professional comedians. In short, life with father seems to have degenerated into a continuous sequence of disrespect or tolerance at best."**

**Obviously there are many poor specimens of fatherhood that deserve condemnation, and even contempt, but this is true of every class of people, including mothers. Yet few, if any, dare to express disrespect for mothers, but there is no hesitation when it comes to fathers. Mother has it all over dad when it comes to poetry and praise. For example, in the hymnal we use we have several special hymns for mothers, but for Father's Day there is only Faith Of Our Fathers, which does not refer to our literal fathers at all, but to our fathers in the faith. Fatherhood in hymnology is just generally ignored, and this is true in spite of the fact that the Bible supports the exclamation of Wordsworth who said, "Father! To God Himself we cannot give a holier name."**

**Clovis Chappell, the well-known Methodist preacher and author of dozens of books, says he searched for some Father's Day songs and could find only two, and both of them were negative. One was Everybody Works But Father, and the other went like this:**

**Dad, dad, dad, the dear old worthless geezer,  
The fusses I have had with that old patience teaser!  
He lacks the spirit of a mouse,  
Most anyone can down him.  
We let him hang around the house,  
Tis cheaper than to drown him.**

**In many families the father is little more than a necessary nuisance handy to have around when something has to be fixed.**

**Father is a fixture, much needed in the home,  
Although he wears no halo above a balding dome.  
As general fixer-upper he makes a handsome bluff.  
There's nothing he won't tackle-if pestered long enough.**

**We could go on looking at the negative aspects of fatherhood, but it will be more profitable to turn our attention to the positive possibilities of fatherhood. The negative is real, but it is one of those aspects of reality that ought not to be, but which will cease to be until fatherhood is restored to a place of respect. This can only happen as fathers learn to fulfill their duties as God intended. This is no easy task, and greater men than any of us have failed. Men of God like Eli the priest, whose sons were blasphemers, and God had to destroy them. David was a man after God's own heart, and he reached the peak of success as a soldier, king, and poet, but he was a failure as a father.**

**In spite of these failures, however, the Bible exalts fatherhood, and gives the father a place of respect, honor, and influence that is unsurpassed. Edith Deen in her book *Family Living In The Bible* says, "From beginning to end, the Bible depicts fathers as teachers of their children and guardians of the family's spiritual riches." The average modern father fails to take this responsibility in the home, and that is why fatherhood has lost respect. The modern father feels incapable, inferior, and inadequate for his task. The *Expositor's Bible* says, a father who abdicates the throne on which God has set him, who forgoes the honor which God has given him, or turns it into dishonor, must one day answer for his base renunciation before the Eternal Father."**

**It is important, therefore, that fathers be informed on this job description. In the passage of the Proverbs we find the essence of the father's duties. It is a job description for the man who would be a successful father. Alexander Maclaren wrote, "The precepts of this passage may be said to sum up the teachings of the whole book of Proverbs." We can't begin to cover it thoroughly, but we want to look briefly at the major areas in which a father is responsible to his children. The first area of duty is that of-**



## **I. DISCIPLINE. vv. 13-14**

**Someone has said that a good father who finds his son on the wrong track will provide switching facilities. Practically everything else in the modern home is controlled by the flick of a switch, and so why not the children? It is a time proven method, and highly recommended all through Proverbs. In fact, it is not only recommended, it is demanded. Prov. 13:24 says, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." Prov. 22:15 says, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him."**

**Dr. James Dobson in Dare To Discipline says a spanking must hurt to do any good. A slap on the hand or a well padded bottom is not worth avoiding, and only encourages defiance. It just does not pay to keep rules that don't hurt when they are broken. If hitting the net in volley ball only meant you had to pause 10 seconds before you continue the game, do you think anyone would bother to discipline themselves to avoid hitting it? Discipline must hurt, but not injure, for that is abuse. Many children are hurt badly and even killed by their parents. This has led to people being afraid of discipline. Discipline is to benefit the child and not injure them. Discipline is to make it clear that you love your child too much to let them behave in a way that will make them unlikable people.**

**It is a father's responsibility to see that his children have the benefit of discipline. We are deceived if we think it is a sign of love to let our children go unpunished. This is the kind of love the sinner is counting on for God to have. It is a weak willed love that lets man be free without danger if he misuses his freedom. God does not have such a love, and no responsible father will have it either. Freedom must be guided by rules, and there must be penalties when the rules are broken. Where anything goes, everything is soon gone.**

**Can you imagine a baseball game in which the batter could have as many strikes as he wanted, and where he could take as many bases as he pleased? Such a game would be no fun at all, and would soon die from sheer boredom. That is the kind of game of life you train your child for when you fail to discipline him, and instead, give him everything he desires without restrictions, rules, guidelines, and penalties. You take the fun and challenge out of every sport when you eliminate the rules and penalties. You do the same thing when you take them out of the game of life.**

**A sociologist recently interviewed some teenagers regarding their impressions of their home life, and he discovered that those raised permissively did not appreciate their experience like those who were disciplined. One girl who lived in an apartment in a big city said the children played in the street after supper in the summer. After a while one would go home because he had to be in by eight. Soon a father would whistle, and another boy would have to leave. One by one they would respond to a call and go home. The girl said, "They would all go. It would get dark and I would be there alone, waiting for my father or mother to call me in. They never did."**

**What that girl needed was a rule to be in by eight, and a spanking if she didn't. The father denied her that blessing, and thereby failed as a father. It is a false love that shrinks from the red welts on the child's skin. What father has not felt some pangs of guilt as he sees the evidence of his anger on the body of one he loves? Nevertheless, if it is done justly for a clear offense, and in love rather than in sheer frustration, it is a father's duty to wield the whip. There are exceptions, for some children never need this kind of discipline, but the majority of children do need to experience some pain in order to learn obedience. My wife Lavonne never needed to be spanked, and she turned out wonderful, but that could be because she met me, and I had enough spankings for the both of us. There is much more that**

can be said on this issue, but we must close and move on with these poetic words of wisdom to fathers.

When the board of education is applied with emphasis  
To the pantied seat of learning of junior lad or miss,  
You'll get results psychologists only dream of getting  
With much less time expended, and the minimum of fretting.

## **II. ENCOURAGEMENT. vv. 15-16**

Fathers can get so wrapped up in discipline and correction that they forget their duty of encouraging their children. In these verses the father is telling his son what makes him happy. He makes it clear that he is delighted when his son is wise and speaks what is right. You can beat the negative out, but you can't beat the positive in. That only comes through encouragement. A child has a basic need to bring joy to his parents, and it is cruel to deprive them of the opportunity. A father owes it to his children to encourage them by telling them what they do that pleases him. If you punish when they displease, and do not praise when they please, you are emphasizing the negative and ignoring the positive method of teaching and expressing love.

Goethe said, "Correction does much, but encouragement does more. Encouragement after censure is as the sun after a shower." We are rich in potential praise, but we hoard it like misers and fail because we do not use the resources at our fingertips. Young wrote, "More hearts in away in secret anguish for the want of kindness from those who should be their comforters than for any other calamity in life." After a good tongue lashing a child needs to be reassured of your love. Prov. 25:11 says, "As apples of gold in silver carvings is a word spoken at the right time for it."

**A little love, a little trust,  
A little word can start a dream,  
And life as dry as desert dust  
Is fresher than a mountain stream.**

**Dr. Henry H. Goddard has proven the value of encouragement scientifically by using an "ergograph." This is an instrument which measures fatigue. When an assistant would say to a child on this instrument, "You're doing fine, John," the boy's energy curve soared. If fault was found, energy decreased. Children need to be criticized when they go astray in order to discourage them and decrease their energy in following a dangerous path, but they also need praise in that which they do right to spur them on to greater efforts in that positive path.**

**For example, take Joe Baines a 14 year old who took delight in kicking younger children, and spitting on them. He thought that no one liked him, and even his mother thought he was no good. Mr. McReady, a visiting teacher, was sharp enough to see his need. He learned that Joe loved airplanes. One day he walked into Joe's school room and openly asked the teacher if Joe could be excused for the afternoon to act as a judge in a model airplane contest at the YMCA. He said, "Joe's quite an authority on model airplanes, you know." That genuine word of praise gave Joe a whole new outlook on life. Other boys asked his advice about planes they were working on, and Joe found the joys of playing a constructive role among his friends. It is a dad's duty to see that his children are praised and given this kind of encouragement. If you don't help your children to make you happy, you can count on it that they will make you unhappy. Next we look at-**

### **III. SPIRITUAL TRAINING.**

**This is a big area, and it involves giving your children a wise and biblical perspective socially, economically, educationally, and morally. It is no wonder that it is so easy to fail as a father. You have to know how to live wisely and godly yourself in order to be an effective teacher and guide. You must have the answers to life's basic questions in your own mind before you can help your children resolve these issues. It is dad's first duty to take seriously the high honor of fatherhood, and to ask for God's help to fulfill his awesome obligations. Great men are not always good fathers, but every good father is a great man, and every good father is one who gives his children a clear spiritual perspective on life.**

**General Douglas MacArthur said, "By profession I am a soldier and take pride in that fact, but I am prouder, infinitely prouder, to be a father. A soldier destroys in order to build, the father only builds, never destroys.... It is my hope that my son when I am gone will remember me not from the battle, but in our home repeating with him our simple daily prayer, our Father who art in heaven." Earthly fatherhood is only at its best when it leads to awareness and dependence upon the fatherhood of God. This is what the father in Proverbs is doing.**

**In verse 17 he urges his son not to envy sinners, but to continue in the fear of the Lord. It is up to a father to be aware when his children are being enticed by the world. The life of a sinner can look so carefree and glamorous that a Christian young person begins to envy them, and wish that they had the freedom to follow. When Socrates was asked what was most troublesome to good men he replied, "The prosperity of the wicked." This is a theme common in Scripture. It is up to parents to help their children to understand that all is not gold that glitters. They must be taught to see beyond the momentary pleasure of sin to the final outcome of pain, bitterness, and loss of both time and eternity.**

**The basic allurements of the world are still the same today. Alcohol and sex both appeal to the desire of immediate satisfaction. The only adequate way to fight this worldly perspective is to counteract it with an eternal perspective. This is what this father is doing in verse 18. Surely there is a future is what he is saying to his son. He is teaching his boy that the hope of the believer will be fulfilled, because when the end comes for the sinner, there is still a future for the believer in which he will be rewarded for his loyalty to God. As the past determines our present, so our present will determine the future, and it is a father's duty to see that his children grasp this truth. They must have a clear cut conviction about the future reward of believers to be able to overcome the present temptations.**

**The world is always the now generation. It sells out the future for present satisfaction. The Christian youth is one who sacrifices the present satisfaction in sin for the eternal satisfaction of the future. A child who does not learn to see life long range is in real trouble, and it will be the parents failure if this is so. Youth must be warned about associations with those who indulge in drinking. We can substitute drugs for excessive eating of meats referred to in verse 20. The way people get their kicks may vary, but the principle is the same. They satisfy the lust for immediate sensual pleasures. It is of interest that almost every religion warns its youth of the dangers of drinking. It is a curse to happiness that is so obvious that no wise man has ever been blind to its folly. It is the world's most productive source of crime and poverty. A father owes it to his children to instill in them a hate for the evil's of alcohol, and any other activity that will lead to a life of sorrow.**

**The other major moral problem that a father must warn his son about is that of sex. In verses 27-28 the father makes it clear that an immoral sex relationship is like getting into a deep pit or narrow well.**

**Once you get involved you can't get out. It is easy to fall into a deep pit, but it is not easy at all to get out. The tragedy is that few fathers give their sons guidance in this area of life. I remember the first time I gave a lecture on sex to the boy scouts that met in our church. We went from A to Z, and some of the fathers were present. Afterward the fathers thanked me and said they just couldn't do it. One said that he was ashamed of sex and couldn't do it. A mother called me and could not express her appreciation enough, for they just were not able to approach the subject.**

**The next time I gave the lecture about 40 scouts were brought in from surrounding areas, and again a group of fathers were there. During the question time one father asked me to explain social diseases to the boys. He had been in the service and knew the dangers, and he wanted his boy to be warned. Fathers want their boys to know and be warned of dangers, but they want someone else to do it. The reason is often due to their own inadequate understanding of sex. If you think sex is dirty, or something to be ashamed of, then you have a sub-Christian concept of sex. If a Christian father cannot give his son the attitude that sex is beautiful and a precious gift of God, then he had better get some books that can do it for him. It is a crime to raise a child and not give them a view of sex that makes it a value they treasure so they will refuse to mar its beauty by misusing it.**

**There is no doubt about it that dads have many duties, and it can be a heavy burden. The good news, however, is that God supplies the energy and wisdom to do all that He requires of us. If you really desire to be a good father, and you work at it, you can succeed. Greater men than any of us have failed, but millions of average men have succeeded, and so can you, by the grace of God. Ask Him for the wisdom to succeed in the duties of being a dad.**

## **8. THE FATHER'S JOB Based on Luke 15:11-32**

**Dick Van Dyke tells the stories of how children act toward their father when they are angry. In his book Faith, Hope and Hilarity he tells of a boy who had been spanked by his father for making too much noise. The boy climbed into his mother's lap and said, "Mama I wish you had married Jesus. He loves little children." Another little boy who had been punished for misbehaving carefully left his father out of the lineup when he said his prayers. When he finished he said to his dad, "I suppose you noticed you wasn't in it."**

**It is not easy to be a good father, for even when you do the right thing you are not necessarily rewarded for it. This is so clearly portrayed by Jesus in the story of the Prodigal Son. The poor father could not seem to win. He had two boys each of which was worse than the other in different ways. The younger son was a liberal rascal who cared only for his own pleasure. He went off and wasted his inheritance on wine, women, and song. He brought disgrace to the family name, and he was an embarrassment to dad. His older son was a self-centered conservative. He was a workaholic who devoted his life to the farm, but never learned how to enjoy life, and have some fun once in a while. He resisted those who did, and so he was also an embarrassment to his father.**

**Two boys from the same father, and we can assume from the same mother, and they are as opposite as day and night. They are both extremists at opposite ends. You have the open minded liberal and the narrow minded conservative. Poor dad has to cope with this pathetic pair of sorry siblings. This parable, and the whole of the Bible, and life in general make our first point clear.**

### **I. IT IS A HARD JOB TO BE A FATHER.**



**If you have any doubts about it, just ask God. He has had the hardest time of any father on record trying to raise a decent family. His chosen people were often more rotten than the pagan kids next door. A major portion of the Old Testament deals with God's grief, and His judgment on His own children because of their folly and rebellion. Many a father as a child who is just like the kids he doesn't want them to play with. God had this very problem, and this confirms the message that Dr. Dobson is continuing proclaiming to Christian parents. You can do everything right to the best of your ability, and pray, and teach wisely, and still have a child grow up and be a rebel. He is constantly dealing with godly Christians who have an ungodly child. They are devastated by it, and they are filled with guilt because they wonder where they failed.**

**Dobson says this is nonsense. You just as well blame God for all the rotten things His children do, as to blame yourself for what your children choose to do. God does what a father ought to do. He gives love, guidance, and instruction for life through His Word, and still those with all of His provision choose to go after idols, and follow the path of sinful folly.**

**The father of the Prodigal and the elder brother is portrayed by Jesus as an ideal loving father. Yet neither of his boys took after him. They were defective specimens of humanity. If you think there is a magic formula that will always produce an ideal child, you are blind to reality, for neither God nor man has ever found such a formula. The Bible reveals children who have an awful background and home life grow up to be impressive godly people. Then there are those who have the ideal environment who grow up to be scoundrels. This is not to lead us to conclude that it does not matter what you do, for it does. The majority of good and godly people had fathers who were good and godly. The majority of bad kids had bad fathers. It matters very much the kind of dad you are, for this will impact your kids for life.**

**My point is that every child has freedom of choice, and the best parents can have children who choose to be prodigals. The best of parents can have the worse of kids, just like the father of these two boys in our text. Chuck Swindoll in his book Simple Faith tells the true story of Robert Robinson. As a young boy he heard the great evangelist George Whitefield in London. He was converted and felt a powerful call to the ministry. At age 25 he became the pastor of the Baptist Church in Cambridge. He was so successful that it went to his head, and he became a carnal child of God. He published several volumes of his sermons, and a couple of hymns. One of them many of us have sung often: "Come, thou fount of every blessing, turn my heart to sing thy grace; streams of mercy never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise." His song lived on even though he faded from the scene because of his bad choices.**

**Swindoll tells of an incident in his life that others doubt ever really happened, but has become a part of his history. Robinson was on a stagecoach, and he was sitting by a woman reading a book. She was so blessed by her reading that she had to share it. She pointed to this hymn that he had written, and asked him what he thought of it. He was overcome with emotion and burst into tears and said, "Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then." Here was a prodigal child of God who made choices that lead him to be an embarrassment to his heavenly Father. History is loaded with children of God who are rebels in the family of God.**

**Why is it so hard to succeed, even for a perfect and ideal father? Because it is a hard job to be a father. The mother has all the advantages. She has carried the child for 9 months, and then she gives birth to the child. There is a built in intimacy of mother and child that a father can never have. He has one strike against him before the game of parenting even begins. The second strike is that**

**men are more self-centered by nature just because they do not have the gift of intimacy that mothers have. This leads them to have a tendency to give their children a self-centered perspective.**

**Randy Lindsey tells of the little boy who was late for Sunday School. The teacher asked him why he was late and he said, "I was going to go fishing but my daddy wouldn't let me." "Good for him," she said, "And did he tell you why you couldn't go fishing on Sunday?" He responded, "Yes he did. He said there wasn't enough bait for both of us." This may be an extreme case, but the fact is, fathers struggle with intimacy. Four year old daughter demanded that her father read her the story of baby Moses night after night, and finally he decided to tape record the story. When she asked to hear it he just switched on the recorder. That was fine for two nights, but then she came to dad again and pushed the book at him. "Now honey," he said, "You know how to turn on the recorder." "Yes," she replied, "But I can't sit on its lap."**

**Children crave intimacy, and fathers seek to escape it. It is easy to do what you like, and dads tend to watch TV, putter in the garage, or play sports. These are fun and easy, and they call for no intimacy. Men do not enjoy intimacy like women do. They can't get enough of it, and men cannot escape it enough. What wives and kids most want from a father is what is least wanting to give, and that is why it is so hard to be a father.**

**Lewis Smedes in his book caring and commitment says his studies reveal most fathers have a feeling of failure about raising their children. They know they lose their temper more than they ought to, and they know they avoid intimacy and getting close, and they know they try buy things to take the place of this closeness. It is just plain hard to be a dad, and there is no escape like there is for other relationships. You can just walk away from a friend. You can cease**

**to be a husband or wife. But you cannot stop being a parent. Even if you abandon your child you cannot make them a non-child. Once you have a child you don't have to say that you will be their parent until death parts you. There is no other option. They are your children till death. It is one of the most permanent relationships of life.**

**You can be a wonderful parent, a poor parent, or a mediocre parent, but you cannot be a non-parent once you are one. There is no place to go to resign. Once a parent always a parent. We don't know the rest of the story of the Prodigal Son. For all we know he became a burden to dad and did not do his share of the work on the farm. He may have started to stay in bed until noon. We cannot assume that he became an ideal man. The point of the parable is that he was forgiven and restored to the family. What fights this led to between the two brothers we do not know. We can guess, however, that dad's job was far from done, and that after the party he still had a hard job of keeping the peace, and of helping his boys become mature citizens of the land, and of the kingdom of God.**

**Being a father is hard job, and one welcome home party does not mean he can retire and take it easy. Good and positive events in life are important, but they are only steps on which we climb to greater heights. They do not end the difficulty of being a father. They just give you a breather so you are ready for the next round.**

**The Gospels reveal three fathers who came to Jesus on behalf of their children. The nobleman whose son was sick unto death, and Jesus said, "Go thy way, thy son lives." Then there was the father with the demon possessed boy that the disciples could not help. Jesus delivered the boy from bondage. Third was Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, whose daughter died before Jesus got there, but when He did He raised her up. These three fathers had come to the end of their resources. They faced a problem so hard they could not solve it,**

**but they had the wisdom to go to Jesus, and because of that wise choice they were able to do a heavy work in their child's life. This leads to our second point, for it is a hard job to be a father, but there is also this:**

## **II. IT IS A HEAVENLY JOB TO BE A FATHER.**

**It is Godlike to be a father, for the authority, control, and power to punish is awesome. But what is most heavenly about being a father is the ability to find the grace, not just to endure bad behavior, but to forgive it, and restore rebel children to your favor.**

**It is the essence of this parable. The hero is not the Prodigal Son. He did have the good sense to come home when he hit the bottom, and he did have the character to humble himself and admit he had sinned. He is made a hero because he shines along side his older brother, who was also a sinner, but who refused to admit he was an equally displeasing personality. But just because one dirty shirt is not as dirty as another does not make it a thing of beauty. The sons are not the heroes in any way. The father is the hero of the parable. If he had failed to respond in forgiveness to both of his sons, who deserved to be punished, there would be no story to tell.**

**The bottom line of this parable is a forgiving father. He even forgives the elder brother for being such a self-righteous and spoiled brat. The elder son represents the Jewish leaders who hated the idea of the Gentile dogs being welcomed back into the fold and family of God. The Prodigal was that Gentile rebel who wasted God's riches on the gods of this world that left them bankrupt. Both are forgiven by God and reconciled to Him and one another in Christ. The most heavenly job on earth is being a forgiving father like God is.**

**Mothers tend to be more forgiving than fathers. Most kids who**

**get booted out of the house and rejected do so by fathers. A father is more likely to reach his limit and breaking point faster than a mother. It takes the grace of God to be able to forgive a rebel child who has wasted your resources and disgraced your name, and in general has been a major pain. It is superficial to assume that every prodigal returning home would be greeted like this one was. The father ran and kissed him, and he ordered a welcome home party all in minutes. Most dads would want a few days or weeks of good clean living before they shelled out any more hard cash for this loser. Let him prove himself, and then maybe we will celebrate. Most fathers would have taken him up on the offer to be just one of the hired men until he demonstrated he had his head on straight.**

**A small child who was ready to say his prayers said to his father, "You can go now so I can talk to God." The father said, "You can talk to me about it." The boy responded, "No, you'll just scold and scold, but God will forgive and forget about it." It is hard to be heavenly minded and be a forgiving father when you also feel obligated to correct and discipline bad behavior. It takes a Godlike spirit to get this job done. It is heavenly work, and fathers don't always have the spirit it takes to do it. Fathers tend to be preoccupied with the business of life, and they forget that it is their business to develop a relationship with their children. This is hard for the smartest fathers to catch on to.**

**Harvey Firestone made 5 million dollars in the rubber business when all his competitors lost money. He was a business genius, but the neglect of his sons led one of them, Bud by name, to become a severe alcoholic. Everyone in the company knew about it, and Firestone was torn up, but he didn't know what to do. His son had been through one program after another, and just went right back to the bottle. He finally came into contact with Sam Shoemaker, the famous pastor in Pittsburgh. He led Bud to make a commitment to**

**Jesus Christ. His life was radically changed, and his wife decided to save the marriage that was on the rocks.**

**Bud's reputation was reversed, and the word was spreading that he was no longer the alcoholic, but a hard working family man. At a dinner at the New York Ritz-Carlton, Henry Ford came up to him and said, "I've been hearing some interesting things about you, young fellow." Bud responded without hesitation. After describing his decision and his new lease on life, he said, "Each day's a fresh start, Mr. Ford. I wasn't much of a Bible reader, but now I find its a great help to read it every morning. I use the Weymouth translation." Ford said he was familiar with that, only the King James version. "I'd be glad to send you a copy." Ford thanked him and added, "Congratulations, Bud. Keep at it."**

**He did keep at it, and became part of the group who with Dr. Bob Smith and Bill Wilson started the movement called Alcoholics Anonymous. All this took place back in the 1930's. The point is, Firestone had given up on Bud as hopeless, but just like the father of the Prodigal, he forgave him when he changed, and he gave him a major responsibility of building the company in Spain, and he did a great job. This true story ended happily because of a father who was will to do his heavenly job of forgiving and restoring a son who had gone astray.**

**It is a fathers job to discipline, and dads are usually able to do this well, but dads often lack the compassion to kiss, restore, and celebrate as did the Prodigal's father. Again it is the issue of intimacy. Men find it hard to show compassion and affection. It is an ideal that is hard to attain, for it seems so inconsistent with the role of the master of the law-the one who lays down and enforces the laws of the family. How can he also play the role of the sensitive loving parent who will hug, kiss, and weep as the rebel child repents? This is**

**the kind of role God has to play every time a sinner comes to Him. They have defied His will, and wiped their dirty feet on the pure white holiness of His name, and yet, He has pledged to forgive and welcome with open arms every rebel who will come to Him seeking His grace.**

**God is able to pull this dual role off well, but men fear being soft and forgiving, for they feel it will damage their reputation as a disciplinarian. Man says, I will stick to the law and let God be the dispenser of grace. But passing the buck just won't do. If dad does not become a channel of grace, he misses out on doing his most heavenly job. Earthly fathers are to reflect the spirit of the heavenly Father. If your child does not see the soft side, the compassion, and love that will forgive and restore to fellowship, they will not see in you the image of God that is expected of fathers.**

**The father that Jesus exalts in this parable is the very image of God. He relates to both his boys just like God relates to both the Jews and Gentiles. He puts grace above the law every time, and He makes forgiveness and reconciliation His number one priority. It is so easy to fall into the trap of the natural mind which says the real issue is, who is going to pay for the damage of stupid and sinful decisions? Somebody has to pay, and no child of mine, who is a rebel, and who disgraces my name, is going to get a party just for saying they are sorry. He is going to get a taste of the hell that he put me through. This is the legalism of the natural mind. The elder brother, who represents the Jewish view of the Pharisees said that this is the right way to think. Follow the way of the law, and make the scoundrel suffer for his sin.**

**Jesus says by this story that the goal of God is not to punish, or get even with sinners, but to restore them to fellowship and usefulness in the family. This is to be the attitude of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and every member of the family who want to be a force for**



**God in this world. The goal is always restored relationships. That is what heaven's plan is all about, and that is what every father's plan is to be about. Fathers are God's agents of the law, but they are also God's agents of grace. To be the first, and not the second, is to be one testament shy of a Bible, or shy of God's full revelation. A half of a Bible is not the Bible, and half of a father is not a father. No child has the father he needs unless he has a father who does his heavenly job of forgiving and restoring.**

**In the final scene of the tragic drama King Oedipus, Sophocles has Polyneices pleading with his father for forgiveness. Like Absalom, the son of David, he rebelled against his father the king, and sought his throne. Now the tables have turned, and his father is again back on the throne, and he is at his mercy. Listen as he pleads,**

**Compassion limits even the power of God;  
So may there be a limit for you, Father!  
For all that has gone wrong may still be healed..  
Why are you silent? Speak to me father!  
Don't turn away from me!  
For your own soul's sake, we all implore  
And beg you to give up your heavy wrath.**

**But the anger of Oedipus is too violent, and he cannot escape the bitterness, and so he spits out these last words:**

**Justice still has a place in the laws of God.  
Now go! For I abominate and disown you!**

**This son goes away condemned by his father's curse, and father and son both die unreconciled. The Bible says this is a terrible tragedy and ought never to happen in a world where Christ died for all sin, and so where every sin can be forgiven. To reject it is to reject the**

**cross, and make life a tragedy rather than the comedy it is meant to be, with a happy ending for all who love the Lord of life.**

**God is patient and longsuffering, and seldom is in a hurry. There is only one time when God is anxious to move fast, and that is when a repentant child is coming for forgiveness. We notice that the father ran to his son. He did not walk, or merely wait for his son to come to him. He ran, and this represents the heavenly job of God's quick response to forgive his erring child. It is a hard job, but also a heavenly job to be a father. To be a defender of the law, and also a dispenser of love takes the grace of God. Nobody needs to be more of a growing Christian than a father.**

## **9. THE PRODIGAL'S FATHER Based on Luke 15:11-32**

**We live in the age of the marvelous machine. In Washington D. C. the traffic for a half mile around the White House is controlled by a computer system. The system is constantly telling the lights when to change to move the traffic according to the need. 450 buses have a transmitter which is linked to the master computer, and if the driver needs to set up a series of green lights to keep moving on schedule he can tell the computer what he needs. If the computer decides it is a justified request, he will get his green lights. If the request will only create problems for others he will be denied.**

**The machine makes the decisions and this is great, for no man can know enough to know what the best decision is. The machine is taking over more and more of man's life. A machine wakes us up in the morning; a machine makes our breakfast; a machine takes us to work where we spend the day working on or with a machine, after**

**which we reverse the process to get back home where we spend the evening being entertained by a machine. We live in a mechanical monarchy where the machine is king. This is certainly not all bad, and we cannot be anti-machine, for God is the creator of the most marvelous machine of all-the entire physical universe. The problem comes when we get so enamored with the machine that we forget our Father in heaven, and begin to worship the creation rather than the Creator.**

**Dr. Ron Doly, a family life specialist, asked 50 thousand children to choose between their TV set and their father. Fully half of them chose the machine rather than the person. Fathers play second fiddle, not only to mother, but to machines. This role of second fiddle is not new. The Prodigal Son chose living with dad as the last choice. His first preference was for the far country, and the pigpen was his second choice. Only in desperation did he go home to dad. The elder brother didn't mind living with dad, but he sure didn't want to cooperate with his father's value system by welcoming his brother home. Here is one of the best fathers in the Bible, and he can't get first place in the hearts of his children even without the competition of machines.**

**Fathers need encouragement for their egos, but there are not a lot of resources devoted to this goal. Even Paul says in Eph. 6:4, "Fathers do not provoke your children to anger." In Col. 3:21 he writes, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children that they may not lose heart." But who is telling the children not to provoke their fathers to anger, and exasperating them so they lose heart? Most of the literature is either degrading, or else it puts such a burden of responsibility on fathers that it leads to despair.**

**Sam Levenson is saying it as a joke, but the only reason its funny is because it is so often true. He said, "When I was a boy I had to do**

**what my father wanted. Now I have a boy and I have to do what he wants. My problem is when do I ever get to do what I want?"**

**Fathers react in frustration and go to one extreme or another. They escape by just letting their children do as they please and give very little guidance, or they try to demand total conformity to their will regardless of how unfair and unreasonable it is. Both extremes lead to the same reaction. Children come to feel that their fathers do not care. They don't care and so they let us do anything, or they don't care so they won't let us do anything. In the book of children's letters to God one little girl wrote, "Dear God, my father said kids is the best time in life. Please tell him what good is it if we never get to stay up and watch anything."**

**Society blames fathers for not being strict enough, and the kids blame fathers for being too strict. One boy said, "When my dad says he wants me to have everything he didn't have when he was a kid-he means A's in school." Fathers are the scapegoat of our cultural desire to find blame for the mess the world is in. Fathers need some encouragement. There are two things I see in the parable of the Prodigal that can be an encouragement to fathers, for these two things make it clear that fatherhood is hard, but that there is hope. The two things I see here are the intricacy and the intimacy of fatherhood. Let's look first at-**

## **I. THE INTRICACY OF FATHERHOOD.**

**By intricacy I mean what Webster's Dictionary defines it to be, "The entangled, the involved, the complicated and difficult." Other words used are disordered and chaotic. It is the opposite of orderly, easy, and regulated. The complexity of fatherhood is all too real, and that is why most fathers would rather just give up than try to figure out how to do it right. It is easy to father children, but it is so hard to be a father to the children you so easily father. Alvin Schwartz said,**

**"..paternity is a career imposed on you one fine morning without any inquiry as to your fitness for it. That is why there are so many fathers who have children, but so few children who have fathers."**

**The Bible does not make this intricate and complex role easier by examples of perfect fatherhood, or by any foolproof guidelines for success. The New Testament is almost void of examples. None of the Apostles are revealed as being wonderful fathers. Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus died when he was young, and we get no clues as to what kind of a father he was. The father of the Prodigal is probably the best father on record in the New Testament. But he had both hands full with his two boys. If you are looking for hints on problem free fathering, you can skip him. He represents God, and yet he cannot get his two sons to love each other and follow the values that he taught them from childhood. The one he thought was the best of the lot turns out to be a real snot in the end. And he wouldn't even come into the house and join him in celebrating his joy over the Prodigal's return.**

**The lack of ideal fathers and families in the Bible just adds to the complexity of the task. We can certainly identify with the frustration of Virginia Owens who wrote, "This is the year my first child will leave home. Over the past 18 years I have often had cause to lament the fact that Jesus never had any children. The area where I have needed the most guidance and the clearest pattern of behavior has been a great gray mist through which move the bewildering and sometimes contradictory figures of Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, David and Absalom. My own mother's favorites were Hannah and Samuel, but then he left home at the relatively uncomplicated age of 3, not 18."**

**She was right, and almost everyone who had children who grew to adulthood were not able to make them follow the path they desired**

**them to follow. Abraham could not make his two boys Isaac and Ishmael get along. Isaac could not make Jacob and Esau get along. Jacob could not make his sons respect his favorite Joseph, and they sold him into slavery. David could not make his children get along, or to keep his son Absalom from rebelling against him. Judges 18:30-31 tells us that the grandson of Moses became a leader of a cult that practiced idolatry. The fathers of the Bible had all the same problems fathers have today. The loving godly father of the Prodigal could not bring harmony into his home, but had two boy who were both a pain.**

**His youngest son was not merely going off to college, or to some profession, or to settle down. He was going off to live an irresponsible life wasting his substance in riotous living. What is a father to do with such a rebel? There is no guidance in this parable, for he has to let him go and just hope for the best. Some fathers in this circumstance say, "If you go out that door it will be the last time you ever come back in it." That was a choice the Prodigal's father had, but we get no such words from him. He just let him go. There is no easy answer for fathers in such a situation. It is always wise not to close any door permanently, however. That is not the way God operates, for anyone can turn to God at anytime, and if they repent they are welcome back. This father was a winner in the long run, not because of what he did, but because of what he did not do.**

- 1. He did not disown his son.**
- 2. He did not blame himself and let his business go to seed. He kept his own life running while his son was ruining his.**
- 3. He did not go chasing after the son pleading with him to stay home.**
- 4. He did not try to control his son by withholding his inheritance. He gave him the freedom to learn the hard way.**
- 5. He never gave up hope that his son would return.**
- 6. He did not throw his sons mistakes and folly in his face when he did return home. He did not say, "I told you so."**

**This is not only hard, it is godlike, and it calls for an intricate weaving of love and patience, understanding and control that can only be possessed by the grace of God. It is extremely hard to be an ideal father. Success in this complex task calls for the best tools. The key tool in this father's success is what we want to focus on as we look at the second point, which is-**

## **II. THE INTIMACY OF FATHERHOOD.**

**God does not hold back his emotions as a father. He is represented by the prophets as pleading with his children to come back into fellowship with him. He is represented by the Prodigal's father as running after the returning son, falling on his neck, and kissing him. God is a father who is intimate. He is not standoffish and remote, and unable to share his feelings.**

**Paul Moody, the son of the famous evangelist D. L. Moody, tells of the time he was about ten years old and his father told him to go to bed. He thought he meant after he finished visiting with his friend who was there, and so he remained talking to him. His father came back after awhile and seeing he had not obeyed spoke with harshness that he was to get to bed at once. Paul says he retreated to his room in tears for his father's tone of voice was frightening. But before he fell asleep his father was at his bedside kneeling and asking for forgiveness for the harsh way he had spoken. Tears were falling down over his rugged bearded face. Paul said it happened over half a century ago, but he would not trade if for any memory of his life, for that laid in him the consciousness of the Fatherhood of God, and the love of God. The memory of his father asking for his forgiveness influenced his life profoundly.**

**Fathers often fear this kind of intimacy where there are tears and forgiveness involved. They think this is weakness, but in reality it is**

great strength. These are the things that communicate intimacy and bring warmth into relationships. Jesus said that those who have seen him have seen the Father, and what do we see in Jesus? We see him weeping over those who will not come to him, and over the sorrows of life that take loved ones from us. How often do we fathers have the courage to be weak and vulnerable? Not often enough. We take the way of the impersonal macho machine and fail to develop intimacy with our children.

The weaknesses and the idiosyncrasies that our children come to know about us are not the ones we share, but the ones we cannot hide. Like the little boy who was helping his mother serve the apple pie to dad and the dinner guests. He carried the first piece out of the kitchen and handed it to the father who passed it on to the guests. When the boy came in with the next piece, again the father passed it on. The boy said, "Its no use dad, the pieces are all the same size." There is a lot of family history revealed in that little remark. Mothers often defend the fathers right to the largest piece because they consider him the biggest kid in the family. This level of knowing dad has some value, but it is not like hearing him sharing his feelings.

The one thing that really stands out about the father of the Prodigal and the elder son was in his openness in expressing his feelings. He was a father who let his boys know where he was at emotionally. He was easy to read, so there was not a lot of guess work and misunderstanding. He was open and intimate. When the Prodigal came home there was no question about his love and forgiveness, for it was conspicuous. When the elder brother was offended by it all, the father came to him and explained his emotions toward him and his younger brother. There was no psychological game playing going on in that family. That does not mean it was a trouble free family. They had their hands full of problems, but they were not caused by the fathers lack of intimacy and open sharing with



**his children.**

**Jesus used one of His favorite words to describe this father. It was the word compassion. Jesus was governed by His compassion. He taught people because He had compassion on them for their ignorance. He healed people because He had compassion when He saw them suffering. He fed people because He had compassion for their hunger. Jesus entered into the feelings of others and their needs, and then He responded to meet those needs. That is what compassion is, and that is the very heart of the ideal father. Letting your children know how one you are with them, for you feel their feelings of hurt and disappointment. They are never alone in their feelings, for they are part of a family where there is intimacy, and their feelings are shared by the father. Someone wrote,**

**One little word, if softly spoken;  
One little tear, if kindly shed-  
Can heal the spirit bruised and broken,  
And cure the heart that long has bled.**

**Jesus had no children of His own, but He still reveals the key to ideal fatherhood, and it is intimacy. Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not." Jesus was a busy man and so the disciples decided to protect Him from the children, but Jesus rejected this strategy. The only way to reach children is by means of intimacy, and so Jesus told them to let the children come to Him. He wanted them to be close to Him and feel His love for them. He spent time with children and did not consider it time wasted. He set the example for fathers by saying that time spent with you children is a priority. A survey in Better Homes And Gardens revealed that 86% of teenagers felt that fathers did not spend enough time with their children. It is not Christ-like to ignore intimacy with your children.**

**If Jesus could give up time in teaching, preaching, and healing to spend time with children then it is a form of idolatry for any father to say he is too busy to spend time with his children. That is exalting your goals and the value of your time above that of Jesus, and such pride can only be labeled as folly. There can be no intimacy without time, and without intimacy no father has done his best. Tim and Beverly LaHaye travel all over the U.S. putting on family life seminars, and what they find is that the average Christian father knows more about fixing his car and getting an underground sprinkler system in his yard than he knows about raising children. The great books on the subject are not read by fathers at all.**

**Fathers escape from the personal dimension of life into the mechanical, for they feel more comfortable with machines than with people. It is common knowledge that the friendships of males revolve around some object. Men have a great time with each other because of some kind of ball, racket, mallet, or club. They relate to each other by means of things. Women relate to each other more personally by their common interest in babies, children, and other people. The result is that the male has a hard time maintaining his masculine image if he gets too people oriented, and so he has a tendency to leave people to the women. Parenthood is meant to be a partnership, but it is dumped on the mother, and dad misses his chance to give his children his best by the power of intimacy.**

**The father of the Prodigal and his brother was not an ideal father because he had two of the best boys who ever were. They were both rotten in their own way. He was the ideal father because he practiced this Christ-like principle of intimacy. It is not a foolproof guarantee to produce wonderful children, but it is the best there is to be a good father. Back in the days when Calvin Coolidge was President, the idea of Father's Day was just catching on. He wrote to Harry Meek, the Chicago businessman who was promoting the day, and he said,**

**"Observance of this occasion is calculated to establish more intimate relations between fathers and their children, and to impress upon fathers the full measure of their obligations."**

**What he said is that the purpose of Father's Day is to promote the best idea God has given us that man can discover for the strengthening of families, and that is the intimacy of fatherhood. The sacred and the secular world come together as one on this issue. This is why God became Immanuel-God with us.**

**He became one with us to develop intimacy. He died for us that we might be saved and become His children. The intimacy of fatherhood is a vital part of God's plan, and it must be a part of any father's plan if he hopes to be an ideal father like the father of the Prodigal.**