



The Teaching Father

"These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them upon your children." — Deuteronomy 6:6-7

My father would frequently address a situation with a Friesian saying. Roughly translated, his favorite one seemed to be, "If it can't be done the way it has to be done, it has to be done the way it can be done." Since I grew up on a farm with well-used, old machinery, that quote seemed to fit a lot of occasions.

Whatever the situation, he had a quip that seemed to fit. Sometimes I would just shake my head and wonder how the Friesians knew about all those different situations we found ourselves in. Other times I would try to meet his with a comparable English saying. "The early bird gets the worm" was met with "better late than never." "Absence makes the heart grow fonder" was met with "out of sight, out of mind."

Now, I wish I had written some of his quips down. Still, every now and then one of them pops into my head—especially when one of my children can't get something to work exactly the way it is supposed to work. I comment, "You know, my dad used to say . . ." Sometimes they smile. Sometimes they roll their eyes like I did when my father would say the same things.

Primary Examples

Whether fathers admit it or not (and whether children admit it or not), they are role models in one way or another. This is true in either a positive or negative way. A father who refuses to recognize that he is a role model for his children is one through his sheer lack of desire to teach his children or by his refusal to be involved with them. The lessons the children learn from him can be detrimental to their future.

Those who have the privilege of having fathers who were good role models are among the better adjusted people within society. If you can look back and say in a positive way, "My father used to say . . .", then God has given you a priceless gift.

It should come as no surprise that the Bible gives us some instruction on how to be the type of fathers that God calls us to be. Our Father in heaven loves us and provided for us through his Son, Jesus Christ. He also shows us how we can have a positive relationship with our children.

In Deuteronomy 6, God gave his people a series of instructions before they were to enter the Promised Land. They were finally done roaming through the wilderness and were about to live in cities they did not build and on farms they had not tilled. They would move into homes, take on new businesses, and become a nation. God tells them that they are to love him and keep his commandments. They are to impress the law he had given them upon their children.

This exhortation was not limited to the nation about to enter Canaan. It is not just for fathers. It is for all believers who long for the second coming of our Lord, when he brings us into the land he has promised us. However, if you read this as a father, you will notice three things that stand out. The first is that fathers are called to love. Fathers are called to love God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind.

Love for God is where the spiritual journey must begin. We must understand that we have been alienated from God and that he has reconciled us to himself through his Son. We are compelled to respond to the sacrifice of his Son in love and gratitude. Love for and gratitude to God go hand in hand. With a true love for God, everything else becomes secondary. Living a life of thanksgiving to God will make all other things fall into place.

Unfortunately, an ungodliness and lack of interest in God has risen in North America that has filtered into many families. Many fathers seem to have forgotten God. They think only of themselves and try to satisfy only their own desires. When God is taken out of the father/child relationship, anything can happen—seldom is it good.

Fathers must believe with all their heart and seek to serve God with all their strength. To do this, fathers must first of all believe in Jesus Christ. He is the great revelation of God. He is the One who binds us to our Father in heaven. With hearts focused on Jesus Christ, we can go to the Father and ask him for anything in the name of Christ and be assured that the Father will hear us. One of the things that we are to bring to the Father is our need to be proper fathers ourselves.

If you have ever felt like a failure as a father, the way to turn that around is by turning to God. Stop wandering away from God by spending time at places you know you should not be or doing things that you know you should not do. Do not get so wrapped up in your work that you do not have time for your children at home.

I stress this because I am convinced that the Bible clearly teaches that in order for a person to be a loving parent, he must first love God, his Word, and his law. That advice will immediately turn some people away because no one likes to have anyone tell them what to do. Lots of people hate their jobs because they have to listen to their boss. But they listen, and then when they get home they vent their frustrations on their family.

We want to enjoy ourselves. Home is our castle. That is where we are the boss. Nobody better mess with us when we are at home.

God's laws, however, enable us to live our lives at home more joyfully and successfully. Moses told the people of Israel, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you— they are your life" (Deut. 32:46-47). The Word of God is the Word of life. His Word gives us instruction for how to live life to its fullest.

It all comes down to this: you either live the right way or the wrong way, and the right way is God's way. Until you are willing to live God's way, you will run into all kinds of trouble.

You will have trouble at work. You will have trouble with your wife. You will have trouble with your children. Unless we live God's way, we will be troubled fathers.

Primary Teachers

Fathers have to love God and His Word, and they have to love their children. That may sound rather obvious. It is only natural that we love our children. But if you really love your child, you will teach your child about God and his Word. The Israelites were charged to talk about God's Word with their children when they were at home, when they walked along the road, and when they tucked their children in at night (Deut. 6:7).

Instead of spending time watching television or sporting events, fathers are to talk to their children about God and his Word. We have to make our homes places that are filled with God's Word. The Bible must be a permanent fixture in our houses—not just with little plaques on the walls, but spoken about from our hearts. Fathers have to learn how to communicate the glorious message of the life-giving Word to their children.

Do you want your children to go to heaven? Well, of course you do! Then teach them about Jesus Christ!

That means, first of all, that fathers had better know about Jesus Christ themselves. That knowledge cannot be a casual knowledge. You have to love him with all your heart, mind, and soul. Fathers must live close to the Lord in prayer. They must live virtuous, pious, God-glorifying lives that are a positive example to their children.

The second thing required of fathers is that they love and take care of the mother of their children. Help your wife as she teaches your children about the things of God. It is necessary for the husband and wife to agree on the basic spiritual issues of life.

Husbands and wives are to remain faithful to one another and show their children what true married love is all about. If husbands do not love their wives, it shows. Children are a lot smarter than we often give them credit for. You cannot fool them. They will notice how your actions do not agree with your words.

In many marriages, husbands claim Ephesians 5:22 for themselves: "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord." What they forget is the previous verse: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (v. 21). And they forget that they are to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25). In my years of ministry I have met several wives who have been separated from their husbands who have told me they would run back to them if only they would love them as Christ loves the church.

A final thing fathers must make certain they keep as a priority in their home is to set aside times when they read the Bible and pray with their families. Devotions in the family are crucial as a means of bringing up the family with a love for the Lord and his Word. Fathers, it may not always be easy to find good devotional material. I would suggest a visit to a Christian bookstore. Do a little homework and find good authors. If you don't want to do the homework, ask your pastor for advice. I would recommend R. C. Sproul, John MacArthur, and Oswald Chambers. If you have a tight budget, I would suggest visiting a secondhand store where you can pick up good devotional material for only a couple of dollars.

Make sure your children know that Christ is at the center of your life and that God is the great Creator and sustainer of all things. That means getting involved in the education of your children. Don't leave it up to the school or your wife to figure things out. Get involved. Why do you homeschool? Why do you send your children to the school they are going to? What kind of books are they reading? What ideas are being introduced to your children? What is Saxon Math? What is OBE teaching all about?

Fathers are called to be the primary teachers in their children's lives. Yes, you have other things to do, and life gets very busy at times. After all, there is the job, the lawn to mow, the hockey game, the baseball card collection. We are busy people. But if God has blessed you with children, your greatest responsibility is to them.

Primary People

You may think some of these ideas are old-fashioned. You are probably right. But let us look at the new-fashioned fathers. Look at the broken homes, broken hearts, broken families, and broken children in our society today. I don't think we can afford to trade the old-fashioned teachings of the Bible for the ideas that have become prevalent today.

Being a good father today comes with all kinds of responsibilities. It strikes me as being pretty near impossible. No father can completely measure up to what is required of him. Try as we might, we have to admit we fail a lot.

The good news is that we can ask God to forgive our failures. God gives us a wonderful illustration of what fatherhood is all about. The God who enables us to be what we should be as fathers is also the God who forgives us when we fail as fathers. We certainly need to be thankful to God for that!

God promises in his Word to lead us toward being more faithful fathers when we love him and his Word. We certainly need his help! We also need to encourage one another to be the kind of fathers God calls us to be in his Word—that is, fathers who love God, love his Word, love our wives, and love our children.

If you are a mother and wife, we need your help. Help your husband become loving fathers to their children. If you are a child, be patient with us. Let us learn to serve God together. Together may husbands and wives and parents and children work to praise the name of our Father in heaven.

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