

## *The Right Kind of Father • Proverbs 20:7, 29:17*

When Dr. James Dobson decided to stop traveling around the country and spend more time with his wife and children it seemed that one factor that most influenced him was the death of his father. He decided that when he is dying it won't matter much how many TV shows he has been on, how many thousands of people he addressed or how famous he was around the world. What would really matter was having his children with him around his death bed . . . children who loved their father and lived for his God.

On this Father's Day we look to the book of Proverbs for advice that will tell us how to be the kind of fathers whose sons and daughters will call us blessed and will follow our God. The right kind of father gives two gifts to his children. The first is the gift of example and the second is the gift of direction.

In Proverbs 20:7 we read, "*A righteous man who walks in his integrity, blessed are his sons after him.*" The word "righteousness" can get some bad press because at times it is associated with people who have a "holier than thou" attitude. That is unfortunate because in the Bible it is a very good and important word that means "conforming to God's standards."

The Bible uses the word "righteousness" in two ways: positional righteousness and practical righteousness. In positional righteousness God sees us as perfect through Jesus Christ. He sees us as absolutely holy, perfect, complete. It's not because I'm perfect. It's not because of anything I have done. It's because, when Jesus Christ died on the cross, he made it possible for his righteousness to be passed over to me. So, when God looks at me positionally, legally, he doesn't see me as I am; he sees the righteousness of his Son Jesus Christ. That's why I have a guarantee of heaven. It's not because of my self-righteousness; it's because of his righteousness.

***Do you know that our fathers probably have more impact in showing us what God is like than any other person in our lives?***

The Bible also teaches practical righteousness. It's when my actual behavior conforms to God. It's not my legal relationship to God; it is the way I function on an everyday basis. It's the extent to which my daily behavior, conversation and thoughts conform to the standards of God. No one ever arrives at perfect practical righteousness in this life. Nevertheless, the Christian who follows Christ as Lord has significant behavioral change which makes for right living.

*"A righteous man who walks in his integrity, blessed (or as some modern translations put it: "happy") are his sons after him.*" The father who really lives life by God's standards has happy sons. That's because they have an example set for them that shapes their lives into right priorities. And right priorities make for right living which is happy living!

Here is a dad who really lives the Christian life! He isn't one thing at church and another thing at home. He's consistent. He tells his children to be honest, and he is also honest. He tells his children to be sexually pure, and he is sexually moral. He tells his children to speak without profanity and in love, and

you can hear that he speaks that way himself.

He's not perfect. He is a sinner—just like the rest of us—and he knows that better than anyone else. In fact, he's far more aware of his own sins than you will ever be. When he is wrong he admits it. When he misspeaks or mistreats, he is quick to apologize and seek his children's forgiveness. But even his errors set an example of what it means to be righteous and what it means to confess and to accept forgiveness.

This father teaches his children what God is like by the example he sets! Do you know that our fathers probably have more impact in showing us what God is like than any other person in our lives?

But, wait a minute! Does that mean that if I have a father who was mean and wicked and ungodly, then that is my image of God the Father? It may mean that, but it does not necessarily mean that. God may work a transformation of himself in our view. But it's still true that the most significant shaper of our concept of God is usually our fathers. That's why it is so very important for fathers to set an example that will mold the perception of the image of God in a child's life.

An autobiographical poem that one anonymous author wrote really captures this for me:

*I know what father's face is like,  
I'm sure I know it all:  
It's like his whistle in the air,  
It's like his step upon the stair,  
It's like his arms that take much care,  
And never let me fall.*

*And so I know what God is like,  
The God whom no one sees:  
He's everything my mother means,  
He's like my very sweetest dreams,  
He's everything my father seems,  
But greater than all these.*

Do you remember the musical Camelot? King Arthur faces the most difficult challenge of his reign. His dream of a kingdom ruled with fairness and justice, defended by gallant knights who sit in equal positions about a round table is about to crash apart. His best friend, Sir Lancelot, and his beloved wife, Gwenevere, are having an extra marital affair. His brave and loyal knights are all at odds with each other.

When King Arthur wonders what to do he reflects back on his childhood and the example of Merlin the Magician. He asks himself, "If Merlin were here today, what would he say? What would he do?"

It's the same with sons and daughters of righteous fathers who have walked in integrity. When decisions are hard, when dreams of Camelot turn into nightmares, when it's time to decide what is right and what is wrong, they ask themselves, "If my father were here today, what would he do?" Blessed are the sons and daughters of a righteous man who walks in his integrity!

Recently I've been reading the moving book entitled *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed*. It's the story of a little French Protestant town in southern France during World War II in the midst of the holocaust that ruthlessly took six million Jewish lives. Across the land Jews were being rounded up and transported to extermination camps in Eastern Europe. Andre Trocme, the pastor of the Protestant church in Chambon, could not agree. He resisted even though it meant breaking the law. He opened his home to Jewish refugees. He risked his life repeatedly to help Jews escape to Switzerland. He was himself arrested and placed in prison.

At the time he was criticized. After the war he was financially poor. It was not until 1982 that his story appeared in print. What did he leave his children? Not immediate fame or power or wealth. To the contrary, they suffered and feared. But he left them an example worth far more than world renown or questionable wealth. He left them an example of righteousness and integrity no matter what the cost.

Few fathers in America will ever face such challenges to their righteousness or integrity. Our example is far more likely to be set by whether or not we pray with our children, whether we pay the full fee for a ticket when we could sneak the kids by with a lie about their age, whether or not we are willing to lose a promotion because we won't compromise at work or by the words we speak and the temperature of our emotions.

The big deal of fatherhood isn't leaving your son or daughter a legacy of fortune or fame. The big deal of fatherhood is a life and legacy of a righteous example. The sage of Proverbs was right on: "*A righteous man who walks in his integrity, blessed are his children after him.*"

The second gift is found in Proverbs 29:17: "*Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.*" This goes hand-in-hand with the gift of a righteous example; it is the gift of loving direction.

Discipline is too often misconstrued to be synonymous with punishment or correction. But discipline is far more than correction. Discipline is setting right direction in life. Discipline is the necessary complement to example. Example

without discipline produces confusion and guilt. Discipline without example produces anger and resentment. But put the two together and they shape lives for good.

Hazen Warner wrote: "Home is where life makes up its mind." So, a father and mother have a responsibility in helping a child to make up his or her mind. Discipline helps a child to make up his mind in the right way.

There are many means of discipline given in scripture. Let me just mention three: they are counsel, the rod and caution.

Counsel is mentioned in Proverbs 3:1-2: "My son, do not forget my teaching but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare will they give you." Fortunate is the son or daughter whose father gives lots of wise and godly counsel. It shapes life! So, fathers, counsel your children about their time, about prayer, about the Bible, about church, about their friends, about their money, about their relationships, about their sins, about their bodies . . . about everything! Teach them all God has taught you so that they won't need to start at the same point where you started.

A second means of discipline is the rod. Proverbs 13:24 declares, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." The right kind of father does not withhold punishment from his child as a means to direct his child's life. It is a mark of love that he will do whatever is necessary to send his children in right directions.

It is a lie of our age that the best thing for a child is to do whatever he pleases without parental direction. That is contrary to scripture! According to Proverbs 29:15, "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother." The rod of disci-

pline is never to get even, to express anger or to inflict harm. It is merely an instrument used in love to set direction.

Some fathers go too far. They are neither wise nor godly. They don't bother to know the truths of Proverbs 22:6 where we are told, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." They ignore a child's individuality, push them beyond their limits and make life impossible.

Ephesians 6:4 is directed particularly to fathers who have a tendency to go too far. It says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." You see, the father who pushes

too far, who expects too much, will build resentment in his child and send his child in the wrong direction.

A 14-year-old runaway was quoted in U.S. News and World Report as saying:

There isn't any conversation, only orders (in my house). There is absolutely no way I'd go back. I'm happier without them. I want a family, a foster family, not a master/slave thing of no trust like I had.

To summarize: The right kind of father actively intervenes into his child's life to give direction through discipline. He does it because God tells him to do it and he does it because he loves his child.

Does this guarantee that every child of the "right kind of father" will turn out right? The answer is not a simple one, but there is insight given in Proverbs 2:1-5:

*My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden trea-*

***Fathers, counsel your children about their time, about prayer, about the Bible, about church, about their friends, about their money, about their relationships, about their sins, about their bodies . . . about everything!***

*sure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.*

“If” . . . it’s conditional, isn’t it? There is still individual responsibility and response. Fine families with right fathers may have sons and daughters who have gone wrong.

This raises two issues. The ultimate reason to be the right kind of father is for God and not because of the result—the way our sons and daughters will turn out. We sometimes talk about turning our children over to God, but we also need to turn our parenting over to God. We need to commit to him the path we should take. We need to set the right example and give the right kind of discipline. Then we need to turn our children over to God. This leads to the second issue and that is rule number 2: The right kind of father raises the right kind of kids. Exceptions exist but they are indeed rare. Focus on the rule, not the exception.

Several years ago Kindred Spirit magazine published an article entitled “What My Parents Did Right.” It told the stories of four young adults including Bob Blaylock. Bob’s father was a 60-year-old carpenter/lumberman when Bob was born. His mother was a school teacher. Bob was raised in a Baptist church and confessed Jesus Christ as Savior at age 7. But it was not until he was a college freshman that he really had a spiritual turnaround in his life. In between age 7 and his freshman year he went through a time of rebellion. He told it like this:

I went through a definite period of rebellion. I remember standing in the kitchen and saying, “Mom, I’m tired of

being a good guy. I don’t want to be a good guy any more!” It lasted a number of years. My dad handled it with the same consistency that he handled adverse reaction from anybody. He just kept on loving. He would not react to my rebellion. He seemed to ask himself, “What can I do to bring him through?” My parents told me what they wanted me to do, but they also said, “You’ve got to make your own decisions.” They could extend to me the freedom to fail. That seemed to curb my rebellion. And they just gave me to the Lord. I think they said, “Lord, he’s your child. If you want him, then you bring him back.”

Bob Blaylock’s father gave to his son the marvelous gifts of righteous example and loving discipline.

Fellow fathers, we have an awesome assignment from God!

Let us give to our children the very best gifts we possibly can. Not 10-speed bikes or a 4-speed TransAm. Let us give to our children the gifts that will last them for eternity: The gift of a righteous example and the gift of loving direction.

Let us learn and live the God-given wisdom of Proverbs:

*“A righteous man who walks in his integrity - - - blessed are his sons who come after him.”* (Proverbs 20:7)

*“Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart.”* (Proverbs 29:17)

*Faith Matters®* is the Broadcast Ministry of  
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church  
6630 Shady Oak Road  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
952-944-6300  
www.faithmatters.fm  
©Leith Anderson