

The Tragedy of a Vanishing Species—Godly Fathers

Or The Fundamental Grace and Behavior Pattern Essential for Effective Fatherhood

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Part one of one. This is a minimally edited transcription of the first of two sermons entitled "Effective Fatherhood", delivered at the Trinity Baptist Church in Montville, NJ and available at www.tbcnj.org.

Please follow in your own Bibles, if you will, a passage from Paul's first letter to the infant church of the Thessalonians, chapter two and the first twelve verses.

For yourselves, brethren, know our entering in unto you, that it hath not been found vain: but having suffered before and been shamefully treated, as ye know, at Philippi, we waxed bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God in much conflict. For our exhortation [is] not of error, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but even as we have been approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God who proveth our hearts. For neither at any time were we found using words of flattery, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness; nor seeking glory of men, neither from you nor from others, when we might have claimed authority as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherisheth her own children: even so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were well pleased to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were become very dear to us. For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: working night and day, that we might not burden any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God [also], how holily and righteously and unblameably we behaved ourselves toward you that believe: as ye know how we [dealt with] each one of you, as a father with his own children, exhorting you, and encouraging [you], and testifying, to the end that ye should walk worthily of God, who calleth you into his own kingdom and glory.

Now, if you were giving any attention to the reading of this passage, you are already aware that it contains a biographical account of Paul's ministry among the Thessalonians. And in the course of describing his and his companion's labors among the Thessalonians, he uses analogies drawn from family relationships. You will notice the very striking one in verse 7: *But we were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherisheth her own children*. And then again in verse 11: *as ye know how we [dealt with] each one of you, as a father with his own children, exhorting you, and encouraging [you], and testifying*. Now, obviously, the primary teaching of the passage has to do with Paul and his companions, as models for the gospel ministry. However, in the course of this biographical description of the labors of Paul and his companions, he uses analogies, likenesses, comparisons between what they were doing in the work of the ministry and what a father and mother do in the work of ordering an ordinary household.

Now in the light of the special day called Fathers' Day, and that a few weeks ago the glorious role of women was expounded from I Timothy 2 and verse 15, I felt constrained, and I trust it was the constraint of pastoral concern under the guidance of the Spirit, to speak to you this morning with respect to the subject of Principles of Effective Fatherhood as embodied in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. He is setting forth in this passage how he conducted himself as a spiritual father among the Thessalonians, but in so doing, he underscores some of the most fundamental principles with respect to effective earthly fatherhood. And so, by-passing the primary intention

of the passage, I want to extract from it some of those secondary lines of the principles which constitute effective fatherhood.

Some of you here this morning are not fathers, and you never will be fathers. You may be mammas someday, but you can never be daddies. And some of you sitting here this morning feel that fatherhood is as far from your mind as night from day. Nevertheless, I urge everyone, no matter who you may be, to realize that, in taking up this subject, there are issues that have a very pressing and personal relevance for each one of you. For those of us who are fathers, the relevance will be very evident. This word, I trust, will come as a word of immediate direction, reproof and correction. For you who are mothers, I trust it will be a word of supportive instruction that, as you see from the Scriptures what your husband is to be as a father, you will bend every effort to be supportive and helpful as he seeks to fulfill that roll. For you who are teenagers, I trust that what you hear this morning will exercise a powerful formative influence, and that you, young men, who are yet to be married, but aspire to marriage and fatherhood, I hope that you will gain from this passage some clear and solid instruction that will become an instrument in God's hands to mold you into the kind of men who, alone, can be the kind of fathers they ought to be. And for you younger women who are not yet married and you single women, as you think in terms of what qualities you will look for in the man who will be your husband and possibly the father of your children, this is where you are to look, even to such a passage as this. And for those of you whose job of fathering you think is done, this has much to say to you, for you have a tremendous responsibility, not only to have your prayers molded by biblical perspectives as you pray for the fathers of our congregation, but you have a solemn responsibility to teach the younger men, many of whom have had no biblical models. You have that privilege and responsibility to instruct them. So no one sitting here this morning is exempt from the pressing personal implications and application of these words found in I Thessalonians chapter 2.

I. Fundamental Grace—The first principle of effective fatherhood that is clearly set forth in this passage is what I am calling the fundamental grace essential for effective fatherhood.

Now this passage contains some amazing statements—we might say almost startling statements in their contrasting ideas. Paul could say that, as a wise, assertive, concerned spiritual father, he and his companions manifested the gentle sensitive love of a nursing mother. Now, isn't that a strange conjunction of ideas—a strong, assertive, firm father who has the gentle, sensitive tenderness of a nursing mother? That's exactly what he says in verse seven. And the grace that lay beneath that gentleness was the grace of a genuine, Spirit-wrought love in Paul's heart for the Thessalonians, because he tells us at the end of verse 8: *ye were become very dear to us* (more literally rendered, *You became beloved to us*). You see, the grace above all other graces which characterized Paul's fatherly influence with the Thessalonians, was this grace of intense, sensitive, self-giving love. He expresses it in the words, *You were become beloved to us*.

Now notice how that love was manifested. Gentleness was its bearing, verse 7: *But we were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherisheth her own children*. Now here's the picture of a woman who so loves babies that she gives herself to be a wet-nurse to other people's babies. She so loves little ones that she lets their lives be sustained at her own breast. Now, if she has that kind of bond to children, what must the bond be when she holds the fruit of her own womb at her breast? It's the epitome of all maternal tenderness. And Paul says, "In fulfilling our roll of godly, assertive, spiritual fatherhood in regard to you Thessalonians, there was this grace of intense, sensitive, self-giving love manifesting itself in a gentleness of bearing." And I couldn't help but think of the advertisement that has fallen along the way, but some of you will remember it--the Timken Roller-Bearing ad. They would always picture this man who had a square jaw like Pop-Eye, with lots of stubble on it, who had shoulders like a professional line-backer, and gnarled hands. He looks sort of like a combination of a sailor, a dock-worker, a construction worker, and

a bouncer, and they picture him with all of those characteristics and stubble on his chin. But then he might be holding a little kitty-cat and stroking its head, and the caption beneath would say this: "So tough, but, oh, so gentle!" You see, that's exactly what we have in this passage. Paul can say, "As a father we exhorted, we admonished, we encouraged." Here was assertiveness. Here was no namby-pamby patsy who sat around with folded hands, who let the spiritual household go to pot! Here was a man with a keen perception of what the situation was, who had a clear understanding of what was needed in that situation, and who moved in with holy toughness and assertiveness to be the spiritual father he ought to be. Yet he says his bearing was that of the gentleness of a nursing mother. Now what is it that makes a man assertive enough to be a good father, yet to have the quality of gentleness? Why it's the grace of love. It is love that is patient and kind. It is love that bears all things, believes all things. It is love that is not easily provoked, seeketh not her own. You simply read I Corinthians 13, and you see in that description of love in its actings and attitudes, that gentleness is woven throughout the entire fabric of that description. Furthermore, it was not only gentle in its bearing; it was selfless in its disposition. Look at verse 8: *We were well pleased to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls.* Technically speaking, that's all that was required of Paul as a gospel minister, to speak the gospel in all the integrity of its God-given contents. He already referred to that up in verse four: *For our exhortation [is] not of error, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: but even as we have been approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God who proveth our hearts.* But he said we went beyond the minimum requirement of simply giving you the content of the gospel. There was this selflessness of disposition. You see, his heart was baptized with that love that is selfless in its very essence. And then he goes on to say in verse nine that arduous labor marked the performance of that love: *You remember, brethren, our labor and travail, working night and day, that we might not burden any of you, we preached unto you the gospel.* What was the fundamental grace that characterized Paul's spiritual fatherhood of the Thessalonians? It was this grace of intense, sensitive, self-giving love, manifested in a gentleness of bearing, selflessness of disposition, and an arduous labor in the out-working of its demands. And I say to every father in this place, whatever other graces are essential to effective fatherhood, standing as king and queen over every other grace is the grace of this kind of love. Whatever else you may have by nature or by grace wrought in you to make you competent as a father, if you do not abound in this grace you cannot begin to fulfill your God-appointed roll. It is this grace of intense, sensitive, self-giving love which, above all else, is essential for effective fatherhood. Without this grace you will not be willing to pay the price of fulfilling your many rolls in relationship to your household. It takes this kind of love that will make you do what is necessary adequately to provide the material needs of your household. It is this grace which above all others will make you say "No" to yourself and engage in those many acts of self-denial essential to understanding your children, setting up strong bonds of communication with your children, giving yourself to sensitive and perceptive listening to your children, giving yourself literally to hours of agonizing prayer until Christ is formed in your children. Giving yourself, if necessary, to periods of prayer and fasting when you meet snags in the development and nurture of your children and you've come to a wall, an impasse and you cannot seem to break through, and so you deny yourself even your necessary food, willing to impart not just bread on the table, but your very soul for your children. Without this grace you will never be the firm but fair disciplinarian that you ought to be. If you do not have beating in your breast the grace of intensive, self-giving love, if you discipline at all, it will be discipline triggered by carnal irritation at your children. It will not be discipline that is self-less, that is sensitive to how much and what form is needed in any given situation. And this kind of love demands that you may be ignorant of who won the ball game yesterday, and spend more time on your face with the book of Proverbs than in your rocking chair with the sports page. It will cost you, father! It will cost you dearly! But if your heart is baptized with holy love, you will count it your joy to spend and be spent for the molding of your children.

Now you see, in this age, that is radical. We live in the age of no-commitment, live-in relationships. No strings attached one week bed-downs. The day of *do-your-own-thing-ism*. *Assert your own rights mania*. That's the age in which you and I live. And the idea that, if you father a child, you are committed for life to a relationship of deep, intense, sensitive, self-giving love that seeks not its own--I say that is utterly radical in the mindset of this generation. But it is absolutely essential for effective fatherhood. And I want to press the question on the conscience of you dads here this morning. How much do you know of that love? Can you say as the Apostle could, *we were gentle as a nurse caring for her children*? Amidst all of the holy assertiveness and the principled toughness of a real father, do your children know you to be so tough and, oh, so gentle? Not sinfully pliable, melting into a little glob of unprincipled back-downs, because they shed a few tears and learn how to manipulate you with their tear ducts. I've seen fathers like that, and could hardly look at them without the shame that I was one of their sex. Children, manipulating with whines and tears. But I've also seen fathers of whom I've been ashamed because I've wondered if they were all stone and no heart. Everything by the book! But no sensitivity to the peculiar cycles of the child's emotional development and reactions and the problems and pressures impinging upon that child. Everything was run like Camp Lejeune, as though the children were a bunch of little marines. No, my friends, what is desperately needed above all else is this intense, sensitive, self-giving love that will make us gentle in our bearing, that will make us selfless in our disposition. How many fathers father children, only to calculate their relationship to those children in what the children can give back to them in the way of prestige and standing in the community? The feeding of their own ego! Fathers driving their sons to be little pro ball players before they're twelve. Why? So they can sit in the stands and feed their own un-mortified ego, and practically cursing a child because he struck out in the 9th inning with men on bases! Beating the child down emotionally and psychologically! Why? Totally self-centered! And, when the child gets older, driving him to get straight "A's" Why? To feed the ego of that parent! That's all! Not concerned about character molding! Just feeding on un-mortified ego. Total self-centeredness, that is a stench in the nostrils of Almighty God! One looks almost in vain to see that kind of arduous labor among fathers who are so willing to leave so much of the development of the children to mamma. When the Word of God says in Ephesians 6:4: *Fathers, nurture them*. Not mothers! Fathers, nurture them!! "Oh, but I put in my 8 or 9 hours." So does your wife, and many more. "Well, when I come home from work, I like to relax a little." So would your wife! But you have only so many years to mold and shape those precious children, now, in the name of God, when are you going to get away from your thumb-sucking? Your self-centeredness? And get alone and cry to God that He will mortify that cursed selfishness and baptize your heart with deep, sensitive self-giving love.

You, young ladies, what are you looking for in your future husband? Don't look at his pretty face. Don't look at the size of his shoulders. Don't look at his ability to fill a purse with money. Don't look at his shiny car. You know what you should look for? You look for a man who manifests a heart beating with this kind of sensitive, self-giving love. And if he's only five foot four and weighs 190 lbs., a little dumpy, a little out of shape, a little bald, he can have a lot of drawbacks, but I'll tell you one thing, fifteen years down the road, on a Father's Day, if, when you gather for your meal, your kids can lead in prayer and say, "O God, thank you for a daddy who has shown by his life that his heart is full of self-giving love," I tell you, you'll feel that the guy is six foot two built like an Adonis, and second cousin to Rockefeller. That's right! That's the truth! That's the grace needed above all else.

And you young men, seeking to become desirable marriage partners, what graces are you cultivating? "Oh", you say, "I pump the iron to look good." That's all right. A little bit of that

won't hurt you. Don't make it a god. "Well," you say, "I'm working hard at my job to be a good provider." Good! Good! Fine! But what are you doing right now to step across the grain of your native selfishness? What are you doing right now to cultivate sensitive, self-giving love? What are you doing right now? What do you do right here at church? Do you break yourself away from that young lady who's caught your fancy and go find one of the little kids and, Lord knows, we've got them all over the place. They're coming out the seams, the drapes. Are you finding little kids and taking an interest in them? Coming down to their little world of innocuous little nothings, until, in their eyes, you're somebody special, because you count to them. You girls, you look for a fellow like that. Walking down an aisle and slipping a ring on his finger isn't going to change him from the self-centered, egoistical prig that he is, into a selfless out-going sensitive father. Do you see how relevant all of this is?

And I say to you men, who are not Christians, and it may hurt some of you. "I'm a good father" you say. In terms of putting gravy on the table and bread, you may be, but listen, no sinner experiences this kind of love as the principle of his life. In common grace some may have it in one area here or there, but listen to the Word of God which says, *The fruit of the Spirit is love!* And this kind of love can only be known where the Holy Spirit indwells the human heart, and it is only for those who are in union with Christ.

We have seen that the fundamental grace essential for effective fatherhood is the grace of intense, sensitive, self-giving love.

II. Behavior Pattern—Now notice in the second place the behavior pattern essential for effective fatherhood: real, consistent, practical godliness. The Apostle moves on from the statement of his love and how it works, to these very striking words of chapter two and verse 10: *You are witnesses and God also, how holily and righteously and unblameably we behaved ourselves towards you that believed. As you know how we dealt with each one of you as a father...* You see the immediate setting of the exercise of fatherly influence is this description of his behavior pattern, without which that fatherly influence would be neutralized. Now what is the essence of the pattern? It was a life marked by three things. Look at the language. *Holily, justly or righteously, and unblameably.* Most of the commentators are agreed that what Paul is doing is pointing to three dimensions of consistent godliness. Number one, it was a life marked by true devotion to God, *how holily we behaved ourselves.* It was a life marked as a life in strict adherence to the law of God. *How righteously we behaved ourselves.* And it was a life marked by a consistent testimony before the people of God, *how blamelessly we behaved ourselves towards you.* So the essence of the pattern of Paul's life in his spiritual parental influence was this a pattern of real, consistent, practical godliness. And to underscore that it was no sham, having dealt with the essence of the pattern, he underscores the genuineness of the pattern, verse ten: *You Thessalonians are witnesses and God also.* In other words, what you saw is *what really is.* We were not one thing in front of you and another thing in secret. If that were so, what you saw and what God saw would be two different things. But he said that the thing to which you bore witness is the very thing to which God will bear witness, namely, that we walked in singleness of devotion to God, we walked in strict conformity to the law of God, and we walked in consistent testimony before the people of God. Now why was Paul so concerned to underscore this fact just as he is about to mention that they were as fathers among the Thessalonians? Well, you see, Paul understood that, unless this behavior pattern marked his influence as a spiritual father, that influence would be greatly negated and neutralized. Paul knew that he would be violating a fundamental biblical law of learning, and do you know what that biblical law is? *It is enough for the pupil to be as his master. For the disciple to be as his teacher* (Matthew 10:25). Paul understood what in our day is called the concept of *modeling.* He knew that, if he were to be the spiritual father he ought to be, he had to be that kind of a father by example, or he would violate a

fundamental biblical law of learning. Furthermore, he knew that his instruction would have no grip on the consciences of those whom he would lead. If you want to have grip on the consciences of those whom you lead, you must so live as to commend your life style as real to the consciences of men. II Corinthians 4:1, *We have renounced the hidden things of darkness, not walking in craftiness nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.* And, furthermore, he knew that if he would demonstrate himself to be anything other than a hypocrite, then he had to be able to say, "My life style as a spiritual father was the embodiment of what I sought to make you." For the mark of a hypocrite, according to Jesus in his indictment of the Scribes and Pharisees is this: *Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! You say, but you do not.* Now for all those reasons Paul and his companions, in the role of spiritual paternity, sought to be exemplary in life. And I say to every father in this place this morning, the behavior pattern essential for effective fatherhood is the behavior pattern of consistent and genuine godliness before the Lord and before our children. If we would be effective fathers, we must at any cost to ourselves, our reputation with the world--now follow me--our career ambitions, and our financial security at any cost to anything in our lives! We must be determined that we'll have a grip on the consciences of our children. That when we speak, if everything in their unregenerate nature rises up and hates it, we'll still have a hook on their conscience, because we're real! Now they may hate it to the point that one man in a sister church hated it. A godly father, setting a godly example administering a godly rule, has a teenage son that takes the bit in his teeth and says, "I am not going to submit to that rule." The father says, "As long as you're under this roof, we go to church on the Lord's Day. You're under this roof. You come to church." "I will not." "Yes, you will." And his anger reached the point that one morning he pointed a gun at his own father's belly, and it was only the father's quick reflexes pushing the gun down that made the bullet hit him in the knee and not the belly. That young man ended up in a penal institution, but two months ago he went under the waters of baptism and now sits with his father in the worship of Almighty God. Why? You say, "Sovereign grace." Yes, but grace that worked by means of a grip upon his conscience that he could not shake. Why? He saw in that father consistent godliness. That's why. And all that the father said had a hook on his conscience, because of what the father was. Without this our children have no model. They do not feel the weight of our instructions. They become cynical and sour upon our religion and feel that everyone's like dad is, nothing but a hypocrite.

If my father were here, I would not say this, and I seldom make reference to my parents, but I want to pay a tribute to my earthly father this morning. Where did I learn proper priorities, that money was never an end to be pursued in itself? Where did I learn that? Where did I learn to have a sensitive concern for the demands upon the mother of young children? Where did I learn unquestioned loyalty to one woman? The proper use of time? Where did I learn being absolutely circumspect in relations to the unconverted? To the extent that I have learned any of those lessons, I'll tell you where I learned them. By watching my father, and watching him to this day. Some of you know that we had the privilege of a visit from them a week ago. My father had to come to New York for the celebration of the 55th year since he graduated from the Salvation Army training college. And I told him, if he came to Jersey, I would take him into the city so he wouldn't have to buck the traffic. So they left early Thursday morning from Lancaster, PA to visit and minister to one of the children and the in-laws, and then to minister to an aging aunt who is in her 90's in a retirement home down at the shore, and then come and visit with us. Well, in the course of our talking together about their trip, my dad mentioned that he was up since four o'clock in the morning. Seventy-four years old, up at four in the morning. I said, "Dad, what in the world were you up at four in the morning for?" He said, "Well you know, son, I teach the Sunday School class at the old folks home, and I knew that in visiting with you on Friday and going into the city Saturday morning, driving back to Lancaster Saturday night, I'd be tired, and it would be difficult to get up early enough Sunday morning to prepare my lesson, and I needed the

two or three hours before we left to prepare my Sunday School lesson for the folk in the old folks home.” A man who has been preaching and teaching for 55 years. He could have thrown something together. How would the old folks know? No, no! A sense of honor, integrity, duty. Seventy-four years old, and he pushes himself out of bed. That’s the example I had, and I’m not ashamed to say I sat in my study that morning and wept like a baby and thanked God for it. And the question came home to me, “If God spares my children and the children of the men of this congregation, will we have sons and daughters that could sit and weep in thankfulness to God for the example we set? Or will their memories be of a spineless, self-centered, indulgent old man that had all his religion on his mouth, but didn’t produce in the crunch?” You fathers, can you say to your kids the things we need to say as fathers and make it stick? Can you teach your sons and daughters personal purity and exemplify it, or when you’re driving down the street does your son, who doesn’t miss a trick, see your eyes take a second look at the immodestly dressed woman? And then when you try to teach him about purity, it all come to naught! Because he knows that you have not made a covenant with your eyes. You talk to him about purity and he’s found girly magazines that you’ve stashed away in your basement or out in your garage. And he sits and watches you as you watch television, and he sees that, even in the midst of a sports program, when a lecherous ad comes on the television, he notices that you make no effort to turn it off or to look away. He sees you sitting there ogling. And you wonder why you have no credibility when you speak to him about personal purity. Just keep that up, man, and you’ll make a perfect hypocrite out of him, a perfect sinner. You try to teach him to be sensitive, understanding, loving, selfless, and yet he sees you come home expecting the whole household to bow down before you, the almighty god called “The Provider,” and simply because you put in your eight hours, to treat you like a king who’s come home from a battle. And he knows that your wife has slogged it out all during the day with the kids and the care of the household. Can you make it stick when you talk to him about stewardship, when he knows that you cheat on your tithe, that your priorities are all mixed up that you can always afford to put yourself in hock for a new car when you want to, but you’d never put yourself in hawk for some need of the church of Jesus Christ. He knows that there’s no consistency in your devotional life. He knows that you cheat on really honoring the Lord on his day. He sees you self-centered and unconcerned for others. He hears the wicked gossip about the table. My dear Christian father, do you hear me this morning? If you’re to be effective as a father, you must be able to say, and I must be able to say with Paul, *You, my children, are witnesses and God also, how holily, righteously, and unblameably I behaved myself among you.*

I speak to you young men, laboring to become the man that would be worthy of a wife and a family. Some of you, I’ve heard you say, “I can’t wait until I get married and have some kids.” And that’s a noble thought. But listen to me, young men. Fathering a child is the act of a moment, becoming an effective father to a child is the discipline of a lifetime. Did you hear me? Fathering a child is the act of a moment; becoming an effective father to a child is the discipline of a lifetime. And you learn it now! Not then! You will be then what you have been becoming now! It’s a frightening thing to read that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation. Some of you are going to live long enough to see the shoddy areas of your life thrown back into your faces by your own children. There’s nothing in the Bible that says if we do what we ought to do, there is a guarantee that our children will turn out right. There’s nothing in the Bible that absolutely guarantees it. But there is much in the Bible that guarantees that, if you go on in shoddiness, the sins you tolerate will be thrown back in your faces by your own children.

Young women, what are you looking for in a man? A good job? Good looks? One who provokes a romantic fantasy about your Prince Charming who will come, not on his white charger, but in his Toyota? You don’t want to support anything bigger than that these days. His Toyota Celica

and takes you off into the sunset? Young ladies, listen to me. When you start casting your eyes on a young man, look for real, practical, consistent godliness. And pray God to give you holy blinders as to the shape of his nose, the shape of his eyes, and the size of his waist line. You pray God to give you grace to see true character, because it's that character that will make him cut the mustard with the children you bear. And your handsome Adonis, who lives poorly, will soon become as ugly and grotesque as the hunchback of Notre Dame in your eyes. And you'll live with it, because you made your choice. You got what you wanted.

And you parents, if God doesn't deliver you from silly pride, "Well, when I introduce my daughter-in-law and my son-in-law, I want to be proud of them. Listen, if all you can be proud about can be seen by a stranger at an introduction, that's slim pickings. That's slim pickings, my dear man, my dear woman! You parents need to have this as the standard that you set before your children.

III. Well, in closing, let me seek to draw all of this together. If the fundamental grace essential for effective fatherhood is sensitive, self-giving love. If the behavior pattern essential for effective fatherhood is real, consistent, practical godliness, do you see, O my dear friends, do you see the impossibility of being a true, effective father without the grace of God? And some of you unsaved fathers, if there is no other motive that would start you to seeking the Lord, I hope this would: You cannot be the father you ought to be without the grace of God, man! You can't be! You say, "I'll show ya." Go ahead and try it. You try to live a selfless, sensitive life when you've got a heart that by nature is selfish and self-centered and insensitive. Jesus said, *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.* Proverbs says, *Out of the heart are the issues of life.* Jesus said, *Make the tree good and its fruit good.* Unconverted man, you cannot be the father you ought to be without grace, and what good will it do in the judgment to have your kids rise up and say, "He provided for me, put clothes on my back sent me to college, paid the bills, but then encouraged me to go to hell with him, because he never taught me by precept and example the way of Christ." You get comfort in the Day of Judgment with that, man, then you can have it! I don't!

And I say to you men who are in a state of grace, "Do you see the impossibility of being a true and effective father without the disciplines necessary to make you a man of God?" You've got to be as much a man of God to be a good father than any man has to be a man of God to be a good preacher. In fact more so, because a preacher can insulate himself from people more effectively than a father can from his children. There are more fake preachers than there are fake fathers. The relationship, of necessity, is too intimate to get away with as much as a lot of preachers get away with. So in one sense you've got to be more real as a man of God to be an effective father, than to be an effective preacher. There are a lot of preachers who preach well and live poorly, and it's only because people don't know how they live that they can still preach effectively. Now I ask you fathers, are you willing to pay that price? Are you? What about your career? What about your reputation? You know that you're going to that 10th reunion of your high school, and all of the hot shot guys are going to be there saying, "I've done this for my company. I've done that." Are you willing to be bottom man on the totem pole, if that's the price you've got to pay to be a man of God in your own home? Some of you, if you determine to become men of God, may have to step down from your present job and tighten up your whole life style. You may. Are you prepared for that? Are you? You say, "The price is too high. " All right, friend, then go on with your false sense of values, but don't say you weren't warned.

As I close this morning, I want to ask you something very personal. I want to ask you, (and my own heart has been searched by this question) in a few minutes we're going to leave this place. And, God willing, we'll all be taken safely to our homes and we're going to gather about our Father's Day meal. I want to ask you something, man, father. Listen to me. Could you ask your

wife to lead in prayer to give thanks today with the confidence that she would bow and say, “Holy Father, thank you for the husband and daddy you’ve given me. Holy Father, thank you for a man who, amidst all of his failures and faults, manifests as the bottom line of his life intense, sensitive, self-giving love. Thank you God for such a husband and a father.” Could your wife pray that way without lying? Come man, let that question screw itself to your conscience and don’t, don’t, don’t run away from it! Can your wife pray that way within the next half hour? Come on, man. Face the question. Feel uncomfortable? O, may God keep you uncomfortable! Uncomfortable until you’re determined to do something about it!! And if your children are old enough to pray, could you say to the children, “Now, kiddies, you lead in prayer today, and give thanks to God for anything that’s on your heart.” Would your kids be able to say, “O God, thank you for a daddy who’s got his goals straight. A daddy that loves us enough to spend time with us. Loves us enough to spank us fairly when we’ve needed it. Loves us enough to hear us in our silly little problems. Lord, thank you for a daddy that shows an example of what it is to love Jesus, to walk with Jesus, to love Jesus.” O my Father, if my wife and my kids can’t pray that way, I’d rather die than go on, simply being the biological cause of my children’s existence. I don’t care if the whole world would bow at my feet for whatever reason. If my wife and my kids cannot thank God for a father who manifests the grace of self-giving love and a life of consistent godliness, it would bring me no comfort.

You say, “Pastor, you’ve really flipped your lid. You’ve gone bananas crazy. In your old age, you’re getting fanatical.” My friend, you show me from this Book where I’ve overstated the principles of effective fatherhood. And, if I’ve been true to the principles of this Book, then some of you need to have a judgment day today. You know what’s going to happen? Some of you will go out of here wounded, and before the afternoon’s out you’ll pull out all of the arrows and heal yourself over. And you’ll be exactly the same next Father’s Day that you were today. And that’s enough to make me want to quit the ministry and go home to heaven. To pour out your soul, your tears, and to have men so besotted with ambition and pride and laziness that they’ll sell the souls of their own children, rather than get upset enough to do something! In the name of God, men, will this be a vanishing species—godly fathers? O may God give us a new breed of godly fathers. Let us pray.

Note

The 1901 ASV Bible translation is used in this sermon.

Credit

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