

The Tragedy of a Vanishing Species—Godly Fathers

Or The Basic Factors Essential for Effective Fatherhood

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

We have looked at the *fundamental grace* essential to effective fatherhood and the *behavior pattern* essential to effective fatherhood. Now let us give our attention to the *basic factors* which actually constitute effective fatherhood, and there are two.

I. Basic Factor Number One: Setting specific goals for the development of our children

The first of these factors is the setting of specific goals for the development of our children. Look at the first letter to the Thessalonians verses eleven and twelve: *as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians, says that everything he did as a spiritual father had a self-conscious and specific goal. Look at the language of verse 12: *that you would walk worthy of God* and the words "to the end" are words describing the goal which Paul and his companions had in all of their labors among the Thessalonians. What they did as spiritual fathers was all pointed towards this one grand goal, namely, the Thessalonians walking worthily of God. If you were to drop down in a helicopter in Thessalonica and see the Apostle in the wee hours of the morning making tents, and throughout the day preaching in the synagogue, taking individuals aside, and admonishing and exhorting, if you were to see him amidst all of his labors and break in at any point, tap him on the shoulder, and say, "Paul, what in the world are you trying to accomplish? What are you doing, burning the midnight oil making tents? What are you doing, preaching like a mad man in the synagogue and risking your own hide in the face of the unbelieving Jews? Why are you spending so much time pouring out your soul on behalf of these Thessalonians?" Paul would say, "I have a clearly defined goal in view. It is my passion that under God my labors may result in nothing less than these Thessalonians, who once were idol worshipers, as he describes them in chapter one, now so walking in every detail of life as to have a walk that is worthy of the God Who, in grace, has called them into his own kingdom and will ultimately bring them home to glory." He was not as a man just beating the air, stirring up some spiritual parental dust and merely expending some spiritual energy and working up a spiritual sweat. He had a self-conscious, clearly defined goal in all of his labors. And, in so doing, he sets a marvelous example of what it is to be an effective father after the flesh. And no man is an effective father who does not set specific goals for the development of his children.

Now let me amplify this matter briefly. As to the origin of these goals, they must be goals derived from the Word of God. Where did Paul get his goal for the Thessalonians? Did he go out one day and sit on a log somewhere and scratch his beard and say, "O, well, any man who's worth his weight in salt has goals, so I better conjure up a goal. Oh, I've got an idea! I think a worthy goal would be the goal of having the Thessalonians walk worthily of God." No, no. That goal was not

self-caused, nor created by Paul. It was the goal which God, himself, had revealed in the scheme of redemption. God, himself, had revealed in his Word that it was his will for his children to walk worthily of himself and of their calling. Well, as Paul in the realm of spiritual fatherhood, so with us in the natural fatherhood. It is absolutely wicked for a father to conjure up goals out of the raw materials of his own notions of what he thinks his children ought to be. It is, furthermore, absolutely wicked to conjure up goals from a consensus of what society says children ought to be. Every father who is anything approaching the biblical model of an effective and godly father, will derive his goals for his children from the Word of the Living God. Why? For the simple reason that the children are not ultimately ours. *It is he that has made us, and we are his.* And the children entrusted to us are a loan from God, and we have no moral right to mold them into anything other than that which God has established as the goal for the development of those children. As to their origin, then, these specific goals must be derived from the Word of God.

But then, secondly, as to their scope, they must be as comprehensive as Scripture demands. Now perhaps the most succinct statement of the scope of these goals is given to us in the familiar words of Ephesians 6:4: *And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but nurture them...* What is the scope of our goals to be? It is to be no narrower than the nurture of the entire humanity of our children. Nurture *them*. It doesn't say, "Nurture merely their bodies, or nurture their minds, or nurture their psyches." It says, "Nurture *them*," and all that makes them *them* is to come within the scope of our goals for their nurture. Therefore our goals in scope must be as comprehensive as Scripture demands.

"Well," you say, "can you put that into some kind of concrete and tangible expression?" Well, surely, a minimum expression of the scope of those goals is given to us in a passage such as Luke 2:51-52. And I say this is a minimum summary statement, far from exhaustive. It is said of our blessed Lord during the period of his childhood: *And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and he was subject unto them. And his mother kept all these things in her heart.* And in that framework of trustful, loving submission to Mary and Joseph, (Mary, the one whose womb was the vehicle through which our Lord was brought into the world, Joseph who was not his earthly father, for he had none. He was virgin-conceived, but Joseph was his father in that sense after the flesh or in terms of a fleshly or earthly framework of responsible parenthood) *Jesus advanced in wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man.* Here we have this beautiful statement of Luke that our Lord matured and developed along these four broad categories of maturation. He advanced in wisdom under the tutelage of Mary and Joseph and the influences to which they exposed our Lord, added to that the influence of his own Father upon his holy mind. He advanced in wisdom. And whatever wisdom is, it is knowledge with its practical bearings upon life in its real circumstances. Our Lord simply did not have an expanding head full of all kinds of facts, while being unable to relate those facts to the nitty-gritty of life. Wisdom is the ability to take the facts of God's world and relate them to the reality of the circumstances in which we live in God's world. And Jesus advanced in wisdom. But then it says there was maturation in stature, and that refers to his physical development. He had an arduous ministry ahead of him. During the three-and-half-years of labor prior to his crucifixion, our Lord would be found in days of prayer and nights of prayer. Days of prayer and fasting. He would be preaching to multitudes without the aid of mechanical amplification. He had to have a well-developed set of stomach muscles. He had to have well-developed lungs. He had to be able to thunder out the words, so that men could hear him. He had to be able to give himself to that arduous task of ministering to the needs of all kinds of humanity's broken and battered sons and daughters. And it is no little factor in our Lord's usefulness that in these days there was advancement of stature. Mary and Joseph were concerned about his dietary patterns, his eating patterns. They were concerned about his physical development, for he could only serve his Heavenly Father in the

body of his humanity, until that body of humiliation was changed into the body of his glory at the resurrection.

But he also advanced in favor with God. There was spiritual development and maturation, as he went up faithfully to the stated seasons of worship. In the immediately preceding context is a description of Mary and Joseph faithfully going with the family to the appointed feasts, to the appointed times of instruction and public worship, and our Lord is found advancing in favor with God. But then also with men. This, of course, addresses itself to the whole area of social development. Where did our Lord learn those principles of holy tact that we see in the days of his adulthood? They did not descend upon him in one big bundle in the baptism in Jordan. They did not get dumped on him when the Spirit came upon him to anoint him for service. He was learning them as a child. He had many brothers and sisters, and they were all his younger brothers and sisters, in all likelihood. He learned sensitivity to people when he had to tiptoe into the house when a little one was taking a nap. When everything in him was bursting to say, "Mommy, I've got to tell you" He learned sensitivity to people. He learned how to deal with people. He learned how to approach people. He learned those social graces that stand out so beautifully and majestically in the days of his adulthood. Our Lord did not acquire these in any other pattern than that in which you and I acquire them. And that's the reality of his humanity, and we so seldom think of this. We read the life of our Lord and say, "O well, all those things were his because he is the God-man." He was the God-man, but these are descriptions of advancement not of God, but of the man. It is the man Christ Jesus who advances in wisdom. As God from eternity, he is the fullness of wisdom. He ever has been and ever shall be. This is pointing to the development of his humanity, and therefore it is a *bona fide* pattern for the development of the humanity of our own children. And the Scripture tells us that this advancement was realized in the context of submission to Mary and to Joseph. And so, with respect to being an effective father, I assert that here must be, on our part as fathers, the setting of specific goals for the development of our children. As to their origin, they must come from the Word of God. As to their scope, they must be as comprehensive as the Scripture demands. What does that mean specifically? It means at least goals pertaining to the maturation of our children in wisdom, in stature, in favor with God, and men. And if you want more details, you sit down this afternoon as a father, and you take the Book of Proverbs, and you say, "O, God, help me to bring within the scope of my goals for my children every goal that the writer of Proverbs had for his son." And you write down every single category of concern, and you know what you'll find out? That father was concerned, not merely with his son understanding the origin of true wisdom—the fear of Lord is the chief part of wisdom. But he takes within the field of his goals such things as fiscal responsibility, the dangers of loose women, the dangers of laziness, the dangers of gluttony, the dangers of drunkenness. He takes within his scope the necessity of integrity, the necessity of honesty in business dealings. There is not a facet of life that the father in the Book of Proverbs does not envision as his ultimate goal for his son. And I say our goals as parents must in their scope be as comprehensive as the Word of God demands.

Now, in applying this principle, do you fathers see the tragedy of having no self-conscious awareness of goals for your children? Do you see the tragedy of it? Paul could say, "All of my labors were bent to this self-conscious goal." He was a wise spiritual father. And every effective father after the flesh, if you tap him on the shoulder and say, "Pop, what are you doing with your kids?" He'll be able to sit down, and he may not do it with the eloquence of a trained speaker. He may not do it with the precise articulation of a lawyer. But he'll be able to tell you, albeit faltering and stumblingly, "These are the things for which I labor in my sons and in my daughters. I want them to be wise. I don't care if they ever go to college or even graduate from high school, but I want them to be wise. I want them to have accurate knowledge of God, and man, and life, so as to be able to relate to the real world with the insight of the God of heaven." Now for most of them

that means they will at least have to get through high school. For some of them it may mean that they have to go to college, but that's not the issue, and this damnable, cursed mentality, "I've got to get my kids through college." Why? We've got more fools coming out of colleges than any other place. It's your own stinking pride, parents! Pride that you can say, "O, I sent my child college." For what? For what? You see, your goal must be wisdom, and, if in the pursuit of wisdom, it's necessary for them to go into the halls of a school of higher learning, fine. But the moment you see those halls not contributing to wisdom, but eroding wisdom and making educated fools out of your kids, you'll pull them out with violence, instead of footing the bill to damn them and send them out into the world as educated fools with no morals and no sense, because they've rejected the wisdom of Almighty God. Do you have goals, fathers? You say, "Pastor, I've never thought of that." Well it's about time you did. You see the tragedy of not having goals that are clearly defined, biblical goals? Do you see the abnormality of having truncated and narrow goals? The goal some fathers have is simply to keep the kids fed and clothed until they can leave the nest, and get rid of them. What a narrow vision. The vision of some is simply to exert enough influence that they'll be able to make it in life and have a decent job and raise a family. Is that the only goal you have, dad? O, may it make you weep to think that you would send your children out into life with no broader vision of what life is all about than that. Do you see the wickedness of having carnal goals? The classic statement of a father who says, "Son, I've got plans for you, boy." What he means is, "My own carnal ambitions which were never fulfilled in my life, I'm going to live them out through you." What a wicked thing! For a father to have goals that are rooted in his own carnal unmet ambitions in his own unmortified pride or selfishness. You see, if we're to be effective fathers, men, we've got to get our priorities straight, because you don't get these goals sitting down for three minutes, and you don't have those goals sharply etched in your thinking, nor do you have the ability to relate where your children are in respect to those goals, and listen carefully. I'm not using the exaggerated language of preacher's talk, you will not have and maintain and have a workable handle on those goals without spending hours before God with an opened Bible, and hours on your face crying to God for wisdom, and for the mighty power of the Spirit to make those goals an actuality in the hearts of your children. And that's the problem with some of you fathers. Your priorities are all mixed up. All your spare time is spent snipping your shrubs and feeding your lawn. All your leisure time is spent whacking a ball down a fairway, parked in front of your TV, tinkering with your car, wetting a line in order to boat a fish, dreaming of your cabin in the woods or your boat at the dock. It's a tragedy that in a day when men had a work week much longer than the current week, and when to mow a lawn it meant you had to go out with the old reel-type mower, and push and sometimes go over the same spot three times because you let the lawn grow a bit too long, and you had to clip the edges by hand because you didn't have weed-whackers going zing, zing, zing. When men had a longer work week and it took far more time to keep up the mundane responsibilities of the home, they were far better fathers. Why? Because this hedonistic age, with the shortened work week, has as its mentality, "Get through that work week, so you can play." We've got fifty-year-old men playing, playing, playing. Whether with shrubs or golf ball or boat or cabin, playing, playing, playing! And we've got young men who are the fruit of that kind of a playing father, and you know what you do when you hear something like we heard last week, you cop out as a miserable sluggard. You say, "O, that standard's too high. I had no model. There's no sense trying." Ah, you miserable sluggard. That's a cop-out! What a cop-out! What you're saying is, "I'm too lazy to get off my duff and to start becoming the man I must be, if I'm going to be the father God says I ought to be! It takes time, self-denial. It costs, man! It costs dearly to be an effective father--to have biblical goals, goals that are as comprehensive as the Word of God demands.

And let me say a word to you children. Do you resent the fact that mom and dad are always on your case? You better thank God for your parents. I do. I didn't appreciate it at the time, whether

I was scrubbing a floor, getting dressed to go out somewhere, no matter what I was doing, they were always on my case. Why? Because they had goals for the development of my character. And they were determined to pursue those goals, not in a way that would please me; you see that in the opening verses of I Thessalonians 2: he said when pursuing our goals, *we didn't use flattering words*, and he says, "You know it." And I'm sure many of the Thessalonians said, "We sure do, Paul. We remember the times when you bore in upon us, and you were far from using flattering words, but thank you, Paul, because we know a little more what it is to walk worthily of God because you were faithful." If you dear children have parents that are always on your case, don't resent them. Thank God for them. Thank God you weren't left like top seed, just to grow. That's the tragedy of this generation. There are times when I sit in my study, as I said last week, and say, "Lord, is there any sense in even trying to do something in a generation that has simply been left to itself?" Next to mighty preachers full of the Holy Spirit, the thing this generation needs more than anything else is effective fathers to begin to mold and shape a generation of kids who will be able to face life in the power of God and in the realism of biblical norms. O, you dear fellows and girls, who have mom and dads that have goals derived from the Bible. They don't care if you're wealthy. They don't care if you ever get a name for yourself. They don't care if you are ever recognized by the world. But they do care if you're honest, if you're trustworthy. They're giving their lives to see you become upright, trustworthy young men and women, with sensitivity to other people, with a concern for other people. O precious children, don't fight your moms and dads. Don't fight your pastors, because we labor with them to see you molded into boys and girls of whom it can be said, "They advanced in wisdom, and in stature, and in favor with God and me." Even when they won't let you have all the sweet junk you want. There's a method in their madness. They're not just coming out of their bedroom having agreed together, "Now what will be our meany thing today? All right, mommy, our meany thing today is only one ice cream cone per day. You think that's why they make those rules? No! They know that if you imbibe too much white sugar, if you give in to your sweet tooth, that you're going to be undermining good health for your mature years, and they know you girls are going to have to have bodies strong enough to bear children and to rear them and to endure the rigors of the household, while at the same time being frustrated you don't give into your sweet tooth and become so corpulent that your husband is tempted to look elsewhere for someone who is attractive to him, because you've let yourself go to pot. See the relationship between teaching a child to govern his sweet tooth at age five and that woman being a good wife and mother at age thirty? There's a direct line, dear people. Do you fathers see this? Do you see it? And has it gripped you? Do you have a hold of that household, so when your wife, in ignorance or with her unusual sensitivity, bends in the weakness of that which is her strength in other areas. Do you lovingly and graciously and yet firmly bring that area into line as the administrator of your household?

The first factor which constitutes effective fatherhood is the setting of specific goals for the development of our children.

II. Basic Factor Number Two: The consistent use of means to attain those goals

The second factor which constitutes effective fatherhood is this: The consistent use of means calculated to attain those goals. Look at verse eleven: *as you know how we dealt with each one of you as a father with his own children, exhorting you, encouraging you, testifying to the end*, you see what Paul is saying? "I had a goal in mind, and the goal was that you might walk worthily of God. And with that goal in mind, I chose appropriate means to the realization of that goal." And you see, that's the second part of actually becoming an effective father. Not only the setting of goals, but the consistent use of means calculated to attain those goals. And I use the word "consistent" because Paul uses three verbal forms, we call them participles, and they are all

present tense participles. “We were continually at the business of exhorting you, comforting you, and testifying. We didn’t exhort once, get discouraged, and quit. We kept at it. We didn’t comfort you once and then quit. We kept at it. We did not solemnly testify once and lay off. We kept at it. The goal was there, and we chose appropriate means for the realization of that goal, and we employed those means consistently.”

I want to say two things now about those means, as I did two things about the goals. ***Number one, the means too, must be scripturally warranted.*** And listen carefully, parents. Paul, as a spiritual father, knew that God had not only ordained the goals, but the means to attain those goals. Paul was not a Jesuit who said, “The end justifies the means.” Or reversing it and saying, “Any means will do, as long as your end is worthy.” No, no. The means must be Scripturally warranted. Paul knew, as a spiritual father, he had only the means of the verbal communication of the Word of God. But he used the full range of that means, from exhortation (literally “consolation” or “comfort”), and then he solemnly testified. He spoke as a witness who was under oath, and he brought to bear upon them the solemnity of the revealed mind of God. He had but one means available to him as a spiritual father, that was the means of communicating the Word of God. But he used every legitimate avenue within that means. And so we, as earthly fathers in the administration of our fatherhood, must have means that are Scripturally warranted. And what are those means? Well, they all are ranged under the two heads of Ephesians 6:4, *nurture them in the chastening or discipline and the admonition of the Lord*. There is the whole pattern of discipline, training by rewards and punishments, admonishing, verbal instruction intensified with earnestness and laid upon the consciences of our children. We must have Scripturally warranted means. No pragmatism. No conformity to the world’s experts on child development. They speak out of the matrix of a humanistic view of man; he’s nothing but the highest expression of animal life. He is not inherently a sinner, nor is he the subject of redemptive grace. And when anyone tries to understand human behavior, in infancy or adulthood, who denies man’s distinctiveness as created in the image of God, his fall in Adam and basic sinner hood, and the redemptive power of Christ, (once in a while God may let a little glimmer of light peek through whatever he says) his so-called knowledge is nothing but accumulated darkness. And some of you read too much secular garbage about children, and that’s what it is. Garbage! The Word of God is sufficient to teach the means available for the training of your children. And so then in the implementation of those means, we must administer them wisely. Look at the text. Sometimes Paul exhorted. Sometimes exhortation would have wounded his spiritual children and discouraged them, so he comforted them. Other times to comfort them would have lulled them to sleep, so he solemnly testified to them. Well, how did he know when to exhort, when to comfort, and to testify? Well, he was given wisdom by the Lord to know what was appropriate at the given time. And do you see, fathers, you then must have that wisdom that God has promised to those who lack it. And who among us, who is attempting to any degree to do his task as a father, does not go back to James one. There are about two or three verses that I’ve said to God, “Lord, I’m so glad you’ve never retracted your word, for if ever I would wear a verse out by use, I John 1:9 would be one of them, *If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. And James one is another one. If wearing a verse out by use were possible, I would have worn it out: *If any of you lack wisdom*. How many times have I knelt before God and said, “Lord, I don’t know what to do. Here is this need in my son or in my daughters. Lord, there’s the goal, and here’s where they are. Lord, I don’t know what they need. Do I solemnly testify at this point? Do I comfort? Do I exhort? Do I punish with physical punishment? Do I withdraw privileges? Do I overlook the issue? Is it an issue that ought not to be focused upon, or is this an index of something deeper? Should I pursue it with the relentlessness of a prosecuting attorney in cross-examination? Lord, what should I do?” We need to administer God-ordained means wisely.

Secondly, we need to administer the means individually. Look what Paul could say: *We dealt with each one of you.* Paul did not simply preach in the public place to the people of God, he would take them aside individually, knowing that each individual had his own peculiar needs. And an effective father is one who, not only has means that are Scripturally warranted, but they are Scripturally employed. And to employ them Scripturally is not only to employ them wisely, but individually. You say, “Pastor, you’re talking about a full-time job.” You bet your boots I am, and that’s why some of you have got to stop playing games. “But that doesn’t leave me any time with my shrubs and to play with my golf ball.” It may leave you precious little time for your shrubs and your golf ball, so what? You have but twenty years to mold that life. You’ve got plenty of time to trim your shrubs and whack your golf balls when they’re gone and you’re influence is basically brought back to zero. They must be individually administered, and, of course, they must be prayerfully administered. Paul could say of all his spiritual children, *Remembering you in my prayers.* We’ve heard the statement: “The best of men are but men at best.” The best of means are but means at best. And if God doesn’t bless those means, even though they are Scripturally based and Scripturally employed, they’ll come to naught. And few things are more humbling to an earthly father than is this tremendous realization, that God must make these means effectual or my children will turn out as though they never had a father who cared for them. It’s just the same way spiritually. You want something to humble you? Preach to people who are unconverted under your ministry for fifteen years. Weep over them in secret and in public. Plead and entreat and exhort and warn and invite. Use every biblical means for their salvation, and yet they’ll sit unconverted and spiritually dead, unless God is pleased to quicken them. And if they try to excuse their impenitence by that truth, God will damn them from their own mouth. But it’s a truth nonetheless. And I tell you, parents, if you’ve got any notion that if you read six books and do everything according to the books, go to a seminar on child-training or something else and do it all according to the rules and everything’s going to turn out all right. And God may have to humble you in a very, very painful way. Well, I’ve said all I wanted to say about those two principles, now I want to close with just a couple very pertinent observations.

If the essential grace for effective fatherhood is self-giving love. If a godly example is the essential pattern and context for effective fatherhood. If the setting of goals and the appropriate use of means to attain those goals are of the essence of effective fatherhood, certain conclusions ought to be very evident to us this morning.

III. Conclusion

Conclusion number one: There is no task under heaven more demanding than that of being an effective father. The Bible records the competence of Eli as a priest in Israel, but his total incompetence as a father. The Bible records the competence of David as a successful and mighty warrior, as an astute statesman and leader, but he was basically a flop as a father. He could run a nation, but he couldn’t run his own home. And there are corporation presidents whose families are in a shambles. Why? It takes more combined wisdom, grace, diligence, and discipline to be an effective father than it does to be a corporation president. That’s why you’ve got corporation presidents who are making it in the business world who are flops at home. That’s why you can have a David who is mighty in Israel as warrior, as statesman, as singer, as poet, as prophet, but basically a flop as a father. My friend, as I said last week, to become a father is the act of a moment, to become an effective father is the discipline of a lifetime. Are you willing to pay the price? You young men, listen to me. You’re living in an age that says, “Pamper yourself. Feed your flesh.” You want to have a couple kids, so you can strut around and say, “Here’s my kids” Have somebody look at you and say, “Hey, there’s my old man. He treats me good.” If that’s all you want, may God keep you from ever walking down an aisle and marrying a woman and

fathering any children. If you're not prepared right now, and I'm looking at a collection of young men sitting together, If you're not prepared right now, then begin to say "No" to your trinkets and toys, and begin to subject yourself to disciplines necessary to become an effective father, you better give up all notions of marriage. Far better to be irresponsible and say, "The standard is too high, I don't want it." That's a cop-out, but far better than become a father and blow the job and not do the work that God has assigned you to do. But a better alternative is to say, "I don't care what the rest of my generation does, by the grace of God I'm going to be molded into a man worthy to be a father of children. I don't care what my peers say. I don't care what anybody else thinks about me. I'm determined that I shall become an effective father. If I become nothing else in life, by the grace of God, I'm determined to become that!"

And then I want to say secondly by way of conclusion, there are few goals more worthy of your arduous pursuit than that of becoming an effective father. I see young men determined to be effective, well-known, successful businessmen. And I see the price they're willing to pay. Burn the midnight oil. Take extra courses. Run to seminars. Pay any price to get ahead in the business world. Where are the men saying, "I'm prepared to pay any price to be the father I ought to be." Where are they? Thank God there are some of them here in this church, and I want you to know that I thank God for some of you.

And I say to you young men who didn't have any models at home, you want to know what it is to be an effective father? You come to me and say, "Pastor, are there some men that I can go and ask them if I can spend just an afternoon in their home to see what an effective father is?" Thank God there are men in this assembly I could send you to without any reservations of conscience. They'd be the last ones to think that they are effective fathers, but they are. But it's that very perspective, you see, that makes them effective fathers. They see the standard. They're pressing toward it with all of their being, and that's why they feel so painfully conscious of their failures, because they're taking the standards seriously. O, men amongst us, set this as your goal.

Young women, look for the young man who is subjecting himself to the kind of disciplines that will make him an effective father. And you young women, I say again, when you're casting your eyes across the available young men, and you're beginning to have your holy, not unholy, but holy fantasies of which one may be your husband, what are you looking for? You look for the young man who is subjecting himself to the kind of disciplines that will make him an effective father. That's what you look for. Because if he'll be an effective father, he'll be a delight to live with as a husband.

And then I say, finally, there are few tasks to which God is more willing to give his abounding grace than to that task of being an effective father. Are there times when you pray and you wonder, "Lord, do I have any warrant to ask what I'm asking for?" That, to me, is the agony of prayer so much of the time. I don't know if I have any warrant to ask the thing that I'm asking for. God says, *If we ask according to his will, we know that he hears us*, and on some things I can't untangle what may be selfish motives. *You have not because ye ask not. You ask and receive not because you ask amiss, so that you might consume it upon your own lusts.* And I'm not sure. "Lord, is this a selfish desire? I can't pray in faith, because I'm not sure that I'm praying out of pure motives." Do you have that agony? Of course you do, if you're a Christian and you pray. But, oh, when you get on your knees as a father and say, "O God, give me all the wisdom I need effectively to mold the life of my child." You don't need to pray, "If it be thy will." You start praying, "Lord, make me wise enough to get a promotion every six months" You will find yourself hard-pressed to find chapter and verse to plead that with confidence before God. God may keep you on the bottom of the totem pole of your company's executive ladder, because he knows that one wrung higher would kill you spiritually. Thank God for his holy disappointments

in which we have been hedged up from things that would have destroyed us. But when you pray, “O God, give me the wisdom needed to mold my son and my daughter, you don’t need to pray, “If it be thy will.” You can pray in faith that, lacking wisdom in that task, God is willing to make you as wise as a Solomon in the administration of your household. And when you pray for a heart baptized and suffused with sensitive, self-giving, tender love, you don’t need to pray, “If it be thy will,” because when you come to the passage that says, “Fathers, nurture them,” you say, “Lord, that’s my task, and I can’t do it without a love that bears all things. Lord, I can’t take that kind of business from my kids. When I give myself to them, and they turn around and, as it were, spit in my face. Lord, I can’t take it.” But having a heart that bears all things you can take it. The love that believes all things, the love that does not retaliate. The love that is patient. The love that is kind. O dear fathers, be encouraged, all the wisdom you need is there in Christ. Seek it at the throne of Christ with earnestness and faith. All the love you need is there in Christ. Seek it at the throne of grace in confidence that God will give it. Seek at the throne of grace greater supplies of the spirit of holiness, that you may set an example before your children. Pray for the grace of humility, that when you have sinned, you’ll not be too proud to tell your children what they already know, that you did not exemplify Christian manhood in the way you spoke to your wife, in the way you dealt with them in any given situation. Your kids do not expect perfection, but they expect reality and transparency when you fail. O, dear fathers, don’t be discouraged. Don’t any of you go out of here, as it were, with your tail between your legs and go off in a corner to sulk O dear fathers, hear me this morning, go to the throne of grace and ask God to give you all you need to be an effective father. And God will delight to answer that prayer.

And you who are not even Christians, you men who have fathered children, but you can’t be effective fathers to those children. Do you see the terrible dilemma you’re in? You may, to a great measure, have been a good father. You have been concerned even for something more than their material needs. You’ve wanted them to become responsible, respectful citizens. You’ve wanted them to honor your wife and to show common decency to others, and I would not demean that all. But, my dear man, listen. You’ve not been able to be a father in the most critical areas, because you, yourself, lack those areas. You couldn’t teach your son how to pray, because you don’t pray. You can’t teach him how to pursue the Lord with all holy ambition to be like Christ, because that’s not your ambition. You couldn’t teach him the grace of humility in confessing sin to those against whom he’s sinned because you, yourself, have not set the pattern. O my unconverted father, will you not seek the Lord. Will you not seek him that he would make you his child and then, as his child, make you the father that you ought to be?

And you boys, beginning to have your dream-world of what you want to be in life, O that God will bring back today and last Lord’s Day morning when you heard that among all the ambitions a man and a young man can have there is no more noble ambition than that of being molded into the kind of man who can be an effective father. Welcome your dad’s rebukes and your mom’s gettin’ on your case all the time. Remember, they’ve got a vision for what they want you to be, and they didn’t get that vision from the world, and they didn’t get it out of their own hearts. They got it from this Book. Some of you don’t know it, but you’re here because your mom and dad prayed, “O God, if it please you, bless our union with children.” And you were conceived in answer to prayer. You were brought safely into the world in answer to prayer, and from the moment you hung upon your mother’s breast, your mom and dad have had a goal and a vision, and they have given themselves. They’ve spent themselves for the realization of that goal, and that goal is that you be the boy or the girl that God created you to be. Is there anything wrong with that? Is there anything wrong with that, fellas and girls? You thank God if you’ve got a mom and dad like that. Some of us can thank God, and the older we get the more we bless God for the vision our parents had and the price they were willing to pay to realize that vision.

There are so many things I would like to say, but the time is gone. The morning is warm, and you've been patient, and I trust enough has been said to drive us to our knees, to cry to God to raise up a generation of effective fathers.

Let us pray.

Note

The 1901 ASV Bible translation is used in this sermon.

Credit

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