

SO YOU ARE A FATHER; BIG DEAL!

II Samuel 18:31-33
Colossians. 3:18-25

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June 18, 1989

A few weeks ago we had a son come home from college and another son finish the tenth grade. Both had final exam week and the pressure from their parents to make the best possible grades. I can just imagine that there were conversations between parents and their children that was similar to the one in our home. "Well, how did you do on your chemistry exam today?" The answer; "I did ok, I think." The parent's voice increases in pitch as he replies, "What do you think will be your final grade?" Your child, who is beginning to talk low and kind of softly, answers: "I will probably make a strong 'B.'" Now the parent's voice gets loud, "A 'B', I thought chemistry was your best subject." The parent's voice continues to elevate as he asks, "Since chemistry is your best subject, then what kind of grades do you expect to make in your other classes?" On and on the parents go, drilling their child like FBI agents. They suspect he or she could be making better grades.

Today is "Father's Day" and a time of showing our appreciation for "dear old dad." If we parents would turn the before-mentioned scenario around, we might ask our children, "What kind of grades are we making as parents, particularly as fathers?" So on this day to celebrate fatherhood, we are going to give your parents an exam in parenting. Children, adolescents and young adults, the table has turned, and so you feel free to enjoy the next few moments.

I. PARENTAL EVALUATION

In school our children take a variety of courses; each one designed to help them grow and mature in the use of the arts and sciences. In the task of parenting, some of the courses easily plug in to the role of fatherhood. I want to talk about several as they apply to the task of parenting.

A. Fathers and parents, what kind of grade would you give yourself in the area of math? What would the "bottom line" be after you have added up the quality times with your children? Since last Father's Day, have you invited your son or daughter out for a quiet lunch? Did you take them to the park or take time to throw a ball? When your child felt like a failure after an exam, did you take time to let them know that you believe in them? Have you been creating a history of events which can be reminisced about later? How many can you add up in your mind?

A moment ago I read for your hearing a portion of the story of King David and his son Absalom. It is a long story but the short of it is that Absalom rebelled against his father; put an army together and tried to take his father's throne by force. Despite David's orders to spare Absalom's life, his son was killed. In grief and anguish, David utters those words, "O my son Absalom.....would I had died instead of you."

David failed as a father because, when it came time to add up their history of quality time together, zero plus zero equals zero. As a king, David failed because he gave Absalom everything but himself. He was a man busy with the affairs of the state like we are busy with the affairs of business. But we can't shut our eyes to the fact David had responsibility at home as well. David never got acquainted with his son, never won his heart. If he had, his son would have been at his side fighting the tribes that threatened the kingdom. Even when David came home after months at the battle field, he was probably more interested in Bathsheba than he was in his son.

Fathers, we need to spend some quality time with our children because their mothers need a break. Anne Morrow Lindbergh has referred to mothers as the "great vacationless class." Even when dad takes a vacation and you take a trip to northern WI to get away from it all, mom doesn't get away. The kids and cooking go with her.

So, dad, what kind of grade did you give yourself in math. How many quality times did you add up? Did it add up like David's relationship with his son? Is there alienation instead of bonding?

B. The next course, or courses, in this job of parenting is typing and shorthand. I am not actually saying that parents should be teaching their children typing and shorthand, for the schools are doing this. But we parents should be teaching our children. There are so many things we are responsible for teaching our children. Some of them are just very practical, everyday things, but important just the same.

Your children will need to know how to fix a stopped up sink or operate the vacuum cleaner or even change the oil in the car. Are you taking the time to teach your children what your dad taught you? I am proud to say that this week, Mark Jr. and I did a wood project together. As for David; I tried to show him how to do a small repair job on the car. A one hour job for a master mechanic took three days. During a lull in the work, my wife asked David if "he was learning anything?" David's reply was that "he was learning; he was learning how to swear." There are some things you shouldn't pass on to the next generation.

Our children need to know how to cook. Cooking is an art we have reduced to the work of one index finger. We use that index finger to press the buttons on the microwave after we have placed a Stouffers pizza inside. We use the index finger to cook by placing it at our temple as we inform the person across the counter that we want a "Big Mac and a large order of fries."

Well, parents, how have we been doing at teaching our children the practical things that were passed on to you? What kind of grade do you give yourself?

C. The last course in this task of parenting is chemistry. What kind of chemistry exists between you and your children? Is there a certain tension between you and the children. Is there a personality clash? Does the family tense up when the old gunfighter comes home from work?

In this land where we value human freedom, there are those who govern their families like a military dictator. What dad says is law. Alice Miller, in her book, *"The Drama of the Gifted Child,"* points out that as parents we can become conscious of our strength when we have a helpless child to nurture. Conscious of our power, we turn our children into "go-fers." She says this reflects our insecurity. (p.66)

The governments of Russia and China don't have the corner on totalitarianism. This kind of functioning comes from the human psyche. We can be the strongest advocates of economic, political and religious freedom and go home to rule like Stalin--killing the spirits of our children with law. It is no wonder St. Paul wrote, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." They passively obey while on the inside a time bomb begins to tick just waiting for some situation to set it off.

What fathers can do for their children is to love them and pray for them. Our prayers shouldn't be convenient prayers like D.L. Stewart who writes the column *Paternalty Ward*. "Oh, Lord," he writes, "please make them old enough to feed themselves." He writes that eventually they did become old enough to feed themselves, "twenty-eight times a day." The prayer that is needed is the one Jesus taught us, "Thy will be done as it is in heaven."

Well, fathers, what is our grade in chemistry. Are we provoking our children to the point of discouragement? Does your child show affection toward you? Does that adolescent consider you a friend as well as a parent?

II. ADVICE TO CHILDREN

Children, did you enjoy having the tables turned? Was it nice to sense that your parents might be feeling the sting of guilt? But, we can't leave you out of the exam. You probably thought you were going to get through the sermon without a scratch. Although, because of time, I won't have as much to say to you. But I will go straight to the point.

A. You may be frustrated because your father hasn't given you the quality time you feel you need. There is hope. According to Daniel Levinson, in his book, *"The Seasons of a Man's Life,"* about middle age a father will begin to be less concerned about building the family nest and more concerned about mentoring and nurturing. Be assured that as an adolescent with a middle-aged father, when your curfew is set at 12:00 midnight and you don't walk through the door until 1:00 in the morning, he will spend some time with you. As a parent, I can tell you that I don't sleep deep until I sense that my sons are safe.

B. Secondly, in order to learn the neat things that mom and dad know you need, take time to listen. You may think that your parents are the dumbest people. Don't worry, as you get older they will get smarter. And in order for you to learn anything about cooking or changing the oil in the car, you might have to change your plans. Your parents have been doing this for you for years.

C. Last, as children you can help the chemistry between you and your parents by humanizing them. Your father and your mother are human beings. They aren't God. They are human beings with weaknesses, and because of those weaknesses, they need your prayers.

CONCLUSION

I asked my two sons to give me a grade as to my parenting skills. They hesitated to give me a grade, maybe because they didn't want to hurt my feelings. I got the impression that if I had been taking a course in fatherhood for this past year, I would have to register for it again next fall.

It is a "big deal" to be a father and for that matter, a parent. It takes a lot of giving and a lot of love to be a parent. And this is where God comes into the picture. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." That is a love that shows you are willing to lay down your life for your children. Parents are willing to give their lives for their children. God has that kind of love for His children for He gave us His Son that we might have life everlasting.

We are dependent on the schools to teach our children about math, chemistry and typing. We are dependent on the church to teach them about God. But they will learn more about the love of God at home. Amen.