

Joseph: Father of James (Part 1)

Papa's Missing

Just before her death in the eighties one of America's best known faces, Lucille Ball, was interviewed by Merv Griffin. He asked her a very insightful question, "Lucille, you've lived a long time on this earth and are a wise person. What's happened to our country? What's wrong with our children? Why are our families falling apart? What's missing?"

Without any hesitation she replied, "Papa's missing!" Lucille continued, "Things are falling apart because Papa's gone. If Papa were here, he would fix it!"¹

Is that true? Listen to the world; they have taken note of it. Marion Levy in her societal critique has written, "For the first time in the history of humankind the overwhelming majority of little boys and little girls continued under the direct domination and supervision of ladies until they reached maturity. This has never happened before in history. Crusades, wars, migrations, pestilence—nothing for a people as a whole ever before took so large a percentage of young adult and older adult males out of the family context for so much of the waking time of the children. Most of us have not even noticed the change, nor do we have any idea of its radicality."²

How bad is it? *U.S. News and World Report* states these facts: 1 in 4 children born have no father to welcome them at birth. Only 40 percent of children grow up in 2 parent families. A million children each year go through divorce; 9 out of 10 will stay with their mothers. When he is present, a normal dad gives his children only three minutes of his undivided attention each day!

Godly dads know their job is important but their home is essential. They express a deep love for their wives but always save some for their children, and they pay attention and respond to their children but even more so to God.

Often bouquets are thrown to moms on Mother's Day, and dads get a shot between the eyes on Father's Day. Amazingly every one of the twenty-seven references to fathers in Proverbs is *positive*! And, when we get to the New Testament the pattern continues. A model dad is Joseph. Everything we see him do is right on. If you are a dad, follow his lead. If you want to be a dad, listen up and learn. If your children are grown, listen and share. Let's all commit to be fathers of the Word!

Joseph: A Godly Dad

Godly dads like Joseph are full of compassion: "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly" (Matthew 1:19). Joseph was compassionate. He planned to put away Mary privately so as not to cause her public disgrace.

Godly dads like Joseph listen to God: "But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.' So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which

was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife” (Matthew 1:20–24). When God spoke to Joseph, he listened and acted upon it. Even though it meant possible ridicule and shunning, Joseph obeyed God in taking Mary to be his wife.

Godly dads like Joseph stay in touch with God: “Now when they [the wise men] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.’ When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son.’ Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, ‘Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead” (Matthew 2:13–15, 19–21). Joseph was sensitive to the Lord and led his family accordingly.

Godly dads like Joseph demonstrate love to their families: “When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt I called My Son.’ Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more’ ” (Matthew 2:14–18). Joseph was the leader and protector of his family. He loved and cared for them through the decisions he made.

Godly dads like Joseph work hard to provide for their families: “After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.’ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: ‘He will be called a Nazarene’ ” (Matthew 2:19–23 NIV). Joseph was the provider for his family. Following the Lord’s leading, he took them to Nazareth where he worked hard as a carpenter to support them. Proverbs tells us that, “A good man leaves an inheritance for his children’s children, but a sinner’s wealth is stored up for the righteous” (Proverbs 13:22 NIV).

Godly dads like Joseph give their children lessons in living: “Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” So they were offended at Him” (Mark 6:3). Joseph was a model for his children to follow. He taught Jesus his trade and that took the time to

side-by-side work with Jesus. Men, invest some time into your children each week. Teach them things that will benefit them in life—how to mow, drive, care for the car, handle finances, etc.

Godly dads like Joseph follow God's Word for raising children: “So he [Simeon] came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: ‘Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.’ And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him” (Luke 2:27–33). According to God’s command to the Israelites, Joseph brought Mary and Jesus into the Temple to offer a sacrifice for purification. Joseph was a devout man committed to following God’s commands.

Godly dads like Joseph lead their family in worship: “His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover” (Luke 2:41). Joseph was a worshiper of God. As the spiritual leader of his family, he took them yearly to the Feast of the Passover. He was a leader in godliness and kept family boundaries. “Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set” (Proverbs 22:28).

Godly dads like Joseph see children as the Lord does. Joseph had at least seven children. He loved his wife and family and paid the price for them! “ ‘Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?’ So they were offended at Him” (Mark 6:3). Children are an eternal blessing. They are gifts from the Lord. “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3–5 NIV).

Having children limits the toys (boats, off road vehicles, fancy cars, exotic vacations, excessive sports, discretionary spending), time, flexibility, and mobility we have. It diminishes financial savings, and it takes a great deal of emotional and spiritual energy. But it is one of the only investments you can enjoy both here and in heaven. Children are a direct physical, visible, tangible blessing from the Lord.

Children are unique because they are your very own, plus they can be your brothers and sisters in Christ, plus they can become your best friends for life. Nothing is more precious as the years pass than to see your children following Christ. Nothing is more heart wrenching than to not see them follow Him. In the world today there is a myth that children are expensive. The truth is they are rich and precious treasures sent from God Himself. Happy is anyone who has many!

The Power of the Father

In Paul’s day, certain attitudes existed that made life perilous for children. One of these was a Roman law called the *patria potestas*, which literally meant “the father’s power.” This particular law allowed the father to have absolute power over every single member of his family. For example, he could sell them all as slaves; he could make them work in his fields in chains; and he could even take the law into his own hands and

punish any member of his family as severely as he wanted, even to the point of inflicting the death penalty. He had this power over them as long as he lived.

When a child was born, the child was taken and placed between the feet of the father. If the father reached down and picked up the child, the child stayed in the home, but if the father turned and walked away, the child was literally thrown away. A letter of 1 B.C. from a man named Hilarion to his wife, Alis, gives us some insight into how children were viewed. It says, “Hilarion to Alis his wife, heartiest greetings. Know that we are still, even now, in Alexandria. Do not worry if when all others return, I remain in Alexandria. I beg and beseech you to take care of the little child, and as soon as we receive wages, I send them to you. If—good luck to you—you have another child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, expose it.”³

Seneca, a philosopher during the Roman Empire, said, “We slaughter a fierce ox, we strangle a mad dog, we plunge a knife into a sick cow, and children who are born weakly and deformed, we drown.”

When children were thrown out by their parents, they would often be taken, if they were still alive, and left in the forum. People would then come by at night and collect the boys to nourish them and make them slaves and the girls to raise as prostitutes.

So, Paul was speaking to a world where the children were severely abused. The parent-child relationship was as sick as it is in our society!

Schooling Today

Every summer ends with the weary masses of families in the fall frenzy of preparation for school—the clothes, supplies, books, and all that goes with education. For the fifty-plus millions of public school children, school is a veritable jungle of penetrating caustic errors, virulent moral infections, and twisted historical analyses of the past often scathing with public attacks on traditional biblical values and living. They are confronted with sex education that is actually pushing them to lust and self-gratification; self-actualization training that teaches them self-worship; meditation and relaxation techniques that are only thinly veneered Eastern Occult and New Age arts; and school buildings that host peer pressures of highest magnitude, violence that terrifies and often plants lifelong fears, and exposure to drugs, pornography and rock lyrics that are nearly indelible in their staining capacity.

Then there are those who go to Christian schools. They face just as much preparation pressures to get them ready and get them there, as well as the added pressure of paying the tuition. But even Christian schools are not safe from many potential dangers.

There are potential doctrinal errors from new or ungrounded faculty members and there are serious dangers of: spiritual elitism, “I go to a *Christian* school”; legalism or externalism, “They don’t have our standards, so they aren’t spiritual Christians”; spiritual apathy, “It’s another chapel speaker, verse to memorize, etc.”; and worst of all spiritual fakes who have learned the ropes and do what they are told, yet are living on mom and dad’s faith or the teacher’s experience of Christ and have never personally experienced the truth.

Finally there are those who are home schooled. They have the challenges of time, space, finances, criticism, and misunderstanding as well as legal threats from an often hostile government. Their pressures are no more or less. They face dangers equally as deadly as the other groups. Have you thought of these?

Isolationists: They can be not merely insulated from the world but so isolated they cannot even relate let alone be as Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:22: “To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” Look at this description of Jesus, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children” (Matthew 11:19). Is your home schooling preparing soldiers for Christ’s army, or is it handicapping them from serving a needy world for Christ?

Exclusivists: They can believe their way is the only right way. Along with the exclusivist mindset comes the danger of elevating my hero, my pastor, my seminar leader, my curriculum developer, my spiritual mentor, my Bible teacher to an ungodly pedestal. “For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:11–13). Is your home schooling divisive or edifying to other Christians?

Without a doubt, the biblical context of education was the home. The portrait in Deuteronomy was a teaching home. The setting of Proverbs is a father and mother educating their children. Historically the Old Testament synagogue and New Testament church only supplemented what was already learned at home.

There is a place in Scripture for some to be taught outside the home. Young Samuel in 1 Samuel 1 was raised and taught in the tabernacle of God. This was much like our Christian schools of today perhaps. Was it safe? No. Meet fellow students Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of the Eli the teacher: “Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD” (1 Samuel 2:12). As we well know they were driven by their lusts and immorality. But Samuel grew spiritually in spite of the evil peer pressure: “the child Samuel grew before the LORD” (1 Samuel 2:21).

Teenage Daniel was educated far away from his parents in the very pagan culture of Babylon. Yet he had, “purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself” (Daniel 1:8). Likely it was the godly teaching of his parents that stayed with him even when he was taken away from them.

However your children are taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, it is your responsibility as fathers to be training them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. “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” (1 Thessalonians 2:11–12).

¹ John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Good News Publishers, 2006), p. 378

² *Ibid.*, p. 379.

³ Papyri Oxyrhynchus IV, p. 744.