

Joseph: Father of James (Part 2)

This summer in the most out of the way place, I was challenged by an encounter with a family from church. I was in the apple shanty at the very back corner of Silver Dollar City bending over the five cent taffy jar when I saw them. The Lord directed our paths so that out of thousands of people and possible locations we met there. This family had not been to church for a couple of months so I told them how we had missed them. Then it all came out—exactly how they felt and why they had not been at church. They said they didn't feel like they were good enough for our church. Everyone there was perfect. I assured him that we are most definitely not perfect, to which he replied, "I wish someone would just get up and say it's hard, and we are struggling." Well, life is hard, and we all are struggling through it!

One of the biggest struggles is being a dad. Have you ever thought about how to qualify as a dad? There is no training, no courses required, no license or degree. It just happens, and suddenly you find yourself faced with the hardest job in life. We know about qualifying. You need to qualify for a job, a scholarship, a loan. You must qualify for the team, the finals, and so on. Does God require us to "qualify"? Let's look at some of the men God used!

God Used These Men

- God uses a doubting and sometimes disobedient dad named Abraham to be the father of the faithful.
- Jacob was a cheat and liar and yet became the father of God's people Israel.
- Moses was a murderer and dragged his feet in obedience, yet he knew God face to face and led and taught the people of Israel.
- Joshua was fooled by the Gibeonites but was used to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land.
- Gideon had trouble trusting God at first, yet God used him to deliver the Israelites from their oppressive bondage.
- David was a ladies man and a poor father, and yet the Messiah came through his lineage.

All this says that it is not the person God uses, it is the Lord! We are all unqualified to do what God is calling us to do, so the key is a willing and responsive heart. That is all God is looking for, a responsive heart! Great things happen when we let Him use us. Joseph was a man with a heart yielded to the Lord. As we saw last week:

1. Godly dads like Joseph are full of compassion.
2. Godly dads like Joseph demonstrate love to their families.
3. Godly dads like Joseph listen to God.
4. Godly dads like Joseph stay in touch with God.
5. Godly dads like Joseph work hard to provide for their families.
6. Godly dads like Joseph give their children lessons in living.

7. Godly dads like Joseph follow God's Word for raising children.
8. Godly dads like Joseph lead their family in worship.
9. Godly dads like Joseph see children as the Lord does.

Four Positive Attributes of a Good Father

What are four landmarks of a loving father? Let me briefly trace them for us:

Fathers must be fair: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4 NIV). How are we as dads unfair at times? The great reformed Bible teacher William Hendriksen warns against six ways fathers embitter their children:

1. Beware of overprotection. Let the boys be boys, not little girls. They need to run, climb, get scraped, and explore, or they will not develop into the leader and protector they must become.
2. Beware of favoritism. Look at Esau and Jacob's mom Rebecca, then Jacob and his doting on Joseph. It embittered those around them.
3. Beware of discouragement. If we always say they will never amount to anything, they might believe us. If we say you are a pain, they will feel it.
4. Beware of destroying individuality. God has made and gifted each of his children uniquely as spiritual snowflakes. Don't make clones of yourself; let God make them as He plans.
5. Beware of neglect. Spend time with them. Put the work or TV to bed early and spend special and long times with your children during those fast passing childhood days.
6. Beware of bitter words and outright physical cruelty. Don't abuse them verbally or physically. That means do not correct them in anger: "For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).¹

Fathers must be tender: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). The Greek word for the phrase *bring them up* means "to nourish, to provide with tender care." Here are a few practical application of this idea:

- Listen to them before you spank them so they know their feelings are important.²
- Apologize to them when you have been wrong, harsh, angry, or negligent.
- Accept the concerns, constructive criticism, and ideas your wife offers, and put them into practice.
- Be a hugger, holder, encourager, and friend. Spread it onto mom too, not just the children.

One author on the family has noted that in the average home surveyed, there are ten negative words for every positive word spoken.³ What kind of words are we using, Dads? Are they healthy, tender, and wholesome to build up your children? Or are they

destroying your child from the inside out? “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:29–32).

The father’s love as commanded in Ephesians 6:4 provides the God-given guide for our children’s moral compass. Do they still have a choice? Yes. Are they still personally responsible before God for their actions? Yes. But we as parents have a responsibility, and we are accountable if we drive them away by our sin. A pastor from the San Francisco Bay area wrote, “Homosexuals are not born, they are made.” His ministry to homosexuals, some tragically from Christian homes, discovered a thread in all their lives. “Either the father was passive and the mother was dominant, or the father was so hard and brutal that the boy was driven away to identify solely with the tenderness and warmth of his mother. Somewhere the compass malfunctioned.”⁴

Fathers must be firm: “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). The Greek word for *training* is a rich word that “may be described as training by means of rules and regulations, rewards, and when necessary, punishments. It refers primarily to what is done to the child.” In contrast the Greek word for *admonition* means “training by means of the spoken word, whether that be teaching, warning, or encouragement. It refers primarily to what is said to the child.”⁵

Years back when members of Britain’s Royal Family toured the US they were asked to share the most amazing thing they had observed in America. Without a moment of hesitation the reporter was told, “The way the parents obey their children.”⁶

God said if your home is not in order you may not lead in the church. “One who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (1 Timothy 3:4–5).

Fathers must be Christlike: “So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8). We are here on earth for a limited number of days. Why not spend the days of our pilgrimage for the glory of God? We as dads need to lead the way in how to live godly among this sinful and fallen race. Chuck Swindoll notes some temptations we as dads must by God’s grace resist:

Material Possessions. God has given us the responsibility to provide for our families. 1 Timothy 5:8 says, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” However we are often tempted to substitute what we purchase for our families for time spent with our families. In other words, toys instead of time. That means nights at the office, endless travel, and weekends working. No gift can replace your presence. Ask your children what they remember about growing up. It won’t be the labels on their clothing. It will be father-son or -daughter breakfasts; trips to the zoo, park, or games; and other ways you spent time with them. It will be the nights you waited up for them,

the games you cheered them on, and the hours you coached them in the back yard or workshop. Give them time with you. That's what they want and need.

Emotional Strength. We are daily tempted to save our best for the workplace and give our families the leftovers. Are you like a jet at the airport? You exercise, refuel, and taxi out of the hangar to fly to work full of energy and ideas all day, only to run low on fuel as you land and taxi into your recliner to shut down for the day? Where are you investing your life? Is it in things that won't matter in a hundred years or in things that last for eternity? Be careful.

Verbal Communication. We often fall into the trap as dads of starting to deliver lectures rather than earning the right to be respected through listening and learning. Remember James 1:19, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."

Personal Achievement. This is such a subtle temptation to some of us dads. We have fallen into the wrong pattern of desiring to be perfect and demanding the same from the rest of our family. Nothing is ever good enough. Tom Eisenman describes some of the tendencies of men who are perfectionists:

- Perfectionists tend to think in dichotomous categories. Everything is great or bad, perfect or worthless.
- Perfectionists also engage in minimizing or maximizing. Failures are maximized and successes are minimized. The small thing that went wrong destroys or at least overshadows everything else.
- Perfectionists set unreasonable goals for themselves and others.
- Perfectionists judge their personal worth by their performance, and they judge others by the same standard.⁷

Sexual Drive. This is the fifth area of living in this wicked world we must guard. This is the temptation to seek intimate satisfaction outside the bonds of monogamy. Simply it means to seek and find sensual satisfaction in reading, seeking, listening, imagining, or even experiencing any woman other than your wife. Don't give in, even for a fleeting peek, a lustful glance, a quick peek in the magazine, a moment on the movie channel, or a meeting with a woman. Flee, say no, and don't look back. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:13–15). It often helps to take reminders of your family with you to work. Look at their smiling faces in pictures on business trips, put them around your office or work area. Talk about your wife as your sweetheart and best friend to your coworkers, especially if they are women. Most of all remember the lives of your family rest in your care.

Spiritual Faith. The final area we are tempted in is to underestimate the importance of cultivating our families' spiritual appetite. You must lead your family to the Word, church, prayer meeting, verse memorization, etc. The children should see dad praying, reading, witnessing, serving in the Lord's work, helping the helpless, sacrificing

resources to invest in eternity, and resisting worldliness and pride. All those area are caught more than taught.

“For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:9). Although Paul is talking about tent making to support himself, the element here we need to look at is that he gave the Thessalonians what they needed to hear at any cost. Dads, have you given your children what they need to make it in life even at great personal cost to your work goals, athletic desires, and even personal free time?

We must realize that God is a God of the second chance. We are sinners. All of us fail Him and others. Christ understands our struggles: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). When we do fail, we must get right with God and with others and then go on.

Conclusion

Listen to Ken Taylor whose Living Bible paraphrase has touched so many lives: *“A Father’s task is many sided, but the most important part of his work is to fit himself and his family into God’s plan of family authority. Children are to be encouraged by the father’s pat on the back, and helped to better things when necessary by the application of the hand or stick to the seat of learning. Of course there are other methods of discipline besides spanking, but whatever is called for must be used. To refuse to discipline a child is to refuse the clear command of God. A child who does not learn to obey both parents will find it much harder to learn to obey God.”*

God said if your home is not in order you may not lead in the church. “One who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (1 Timothy 3:4–5).

Strive to be Christlike: “So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8). We are here on earth for a limited number of days. Why not spend the days of our pilgrimage for the glory of God? We as dads need to lead the way in how to live godly among this sinful and fallen race.

¹ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary Ephesians* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), p. 261.

² Steve Farrar, *Point Man: How a Man Can Lead His Family* (Multnomah Publishers, 1994), p. 211.

³ Dan Benson, *The Total Man* (Tyndale House Publishers, 1977), p. 183.

⁴ Farrar, p. 202, 203.

⁵ Hendriksen, p. 62.

⁶ Farrar, p. 216.

⁷ Tom Eisenman, *Temptations Men Face* (Inter Varsity Press, 1990), pp. 168-170.