

Leading a Family: Mentoring Meaningfully at Home
August 1, 2010

My father's counsel:

- *Be a Discerning Dad* – Discern Scripturally what a dad should be
- *Be a Dedicated Dad* – Be dedicated to do what you learn
- *Be a Discipling Dad* – Disciple in the home by example

Thesis: By faith, I need to deliberately _____ each family member consistently and with _____.

Here's an expanded version of the sentence:

By faith, I (not another member of my family) need to . . .

- Deliberately (not passively) lead (disciple by example, atmosphere, and word) each family member (wife and children)
- consistently (event by event, child by child, day by day)
- with endurance (year by year, stage by stage, with eternity in view).

The challenges to which a father must submit: leadership, consistency, and endurance.

Let's begin consideration of this most relevant and important topic by reading the following accounts:

A Preacher's Assessment A Century Ago

John Henry Jowett (1864-1923) preached a memorable sermon in October, 1906, entitled "The Ministry of a Transfigured Home." In the sermon, he lamented the diminution of the concept of "home," having observed its succumbing to rising pressure from the state, the church, and schools. Nothing, he contended, however advantageous, could truly surpass the impact of spiritual teaching from within the home. Sadly, the "priestly lips of the ordained parent" often remained silent or were simply being replaced.

“It was not only that the home was no longer a school: it was no longer a temple. The _____ was overthrown. Parents provided their children with food, raiment, shelter, schooling, but . . . the apostolic duties of religion did not come within the recognized scope of parental responsibility.”

He believed that the abdication of parental responsibility could be traced partially to a “dull and even flippant conception of the solemn sacrament of marriage. . . . [T]he marriage relationship was entered into as though life were a jaunty picnic and not a grave crusade” (Arthur Porritt, *John Henry Jowett*, 122-24). In the sermon, he wonders aloud if it would even be possible – on a large scale – for the home to be restored to its rightful place.

A Famed Missionary’s Lament

David Livingstone, the great pioneer missionary to the dark continent of Africa, and his wife Mary had a most unusual home life. Their marriage lasted from January 2, 1845 – April, 1862. During this time, they had six children; however, only for a few of those years were they able to settle into much of a routine at all. In 1870, toward the end of Livingstone’s life (d. 1873), he reflectively penned the following words:

I often ponder over my missionary career . . . , and though conscious of many imperfections, not a single pang of regret rises in the view of my conduct, *except that I did not feel it to be my duty, while spending all my energy in teaching the heathen, to devote a special portion of my time to _____ with my children.* But generally I was so much exhausted with the mental and manual labor of the day, that in the evening there was no fun left in me. I did not play with my little ones while I had them, and they soon sprung up in my absences, and left me conscious that I had none to play with (W. G. Blaikie, *David Livingstone*, 112-13, emphasis mine).

His biographer's apt assessment reads as follows:

But Livingstone's case was no _____
to that mysterious law of our life in this world, by which in
so many things, we learn how to correct our errors only
after the opportunity is gone. Of all the crooks in his lot,
that which gave him so short an opportunity to securing
affections and molding the character of his children
seems to have been the hardest to bear (W. G. Blaikie,
David Livingstone, 112-13).

Cautionary Counsel from the Seventeenth Century

Let's look further back about 200 years earlier to the ministry
of Richard Baxter (1615 –1691) and listen to his counsel
(from *A Christian Directory*, under "General Directions for the
Holy Government of Families")

"Let governors maintain their authority [not forfeit their
roles] in their families. For if once that be lost, and you
are despised by those that you should rule, your word will
be of no effect with them; you do but ride without a bridle;
your power of governing is gone, when your authority is
lost."

"Lose not your authority by a neglect of using it. If you
suffer children . . . but a little while to have the head, and
to have, and say, and do what they will, your government
will be but a name or image."

"Lose not your authority by too much familiarity. If you
make your children . . . your play-fellows, or equals, and
talk to them, and suffer them to talk to you, as your
companions, they will quickly grow upon you, and hold
their custom [of seeing you as an equal], and though
another may govern them, they will scarce ever endure to
be governed by you, but will scorn to be subject where
they have once been as equal."

Being a husband and father is a humbling topic to consider, and it is more humbling when we personalize it – when we see ourselves in it and recognize the daunting nature of its unrelenting obligations and our own inconsistencies in fulfilling them. We realize slowly what we wish we had known before – that parenting has as much to do with who I am as it does with what I say and do with my children.

Husbands and fathers fulfill a vital role in God's economy, and God does not minimize their importance. In fact, God magnifies their importance:

- *For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him* (Genesis 18:19).
- Nehemiah 8:13
- ⁴ *He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity*
⁵ *(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?* (1 Timothy 3:4-5)
- _____, *do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord* (Ephesians 6:4).
- Psalm 101 – The Householder Psalm

Let us call ourselves to re-acknowledge and to re-embrace the leadership role God has given us. He has been calling dads to this since the early pages of Scripture. Dads have been wrestling with their imperfections ever since, but our imperfections can never excuse an unwillingness to obey God's commands for our roles.

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