

“These are your kids . . . be their dad!”

They’re Your Kids . . . Be Their Dad – Part IV

Selected Scripture

Introduction

A couple of years ago, the United States Department of Health and Human Services launched a new, nationwide public service campaign. It was designed to challenge fathers to become connected to their children – whether they lived in the same home or not.

Obviously, the world understands facts. They are aware that seventeen million children have little or no contact with their biological father. And that number does not include millions more who live in the same house with their father, but only get about thirty minutes of conversation with them in over a week’s time.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services has begun to connect the dots.

They know that sexual promiscuity has led to such an epidemic of diseases that now, one out of every four teenage girls has a sexually transmitted disease. Society is connecting the dots between promiscuity and parental abandonment.

They are aware that four super bowl sized stadiums are filled this morning, so to speak, with teenagers who are using prostitution to support their drug addiction.

They are beginning to figure out the connection between a weakened social structure and the fact that one out of every three children born, according to recent United States Census Bureau statistics, will be born to a single mother.

They have begun to form a correlation between the lack of a father’s involvement and the one million

teenage girls who will become pregnant in 2005. Nearly half of these girls will pursue an abortion.

So what is their plan? A campaign built around this phrase, “They’re your kids. Be their dad!”

As always, the basic solution of our society is education. In other words, make people aware of their problem, and awareness will bring action which will alleviate the problem.

This would be like telling someone they have cancer, and then expecting them to heal because they now know they have it.

“Here’s our plan – give them this slogan, “They’re your kids . . . be their dad.””

That slogan, however, brings up a very real problem. A man does not enter fatherhood readymade. You become a father in the delivery room, but you do not know how to be a dad.

I vividly remember my first trip with Marsha to the delivery room across the street from Dallas Seminary at Baylor hospital. I vividly remember much of it because it was very traumatic. A father and son team were to deliver our sons. They had announced that our twin boys would be born without a cesarean section, if at all possible. We learned later that many of the medical professionals in their office had never seen twins delivered in this way, so they all showed up. They were everywhere. I could have sold tickets and paid off my seminary bill!

Everything went as planned. The twins were born two minutes apart. What incredible activity there was in that room. There were assistants everywhere – measuring, cleaning, talking. I remember being

bewildered. The thought crossed my mind, and I later recorded these words, “What do I do now?”

Was I proud? Absolutely! Was I unprepared? Totally!

It is no surprise that fathers *and* mothers are both informed in the New Testament that parenting is something that must be learned. You do not become a good father or mother in the delivery room, at the first wail of your newborn son or daughter.

“They’re your kids . . . be their dad.”

The question is, “How?! How?!”

Have you discovered that the Bible does not provide even one role model of family life? You will discover positive qualities in family relationships, which are evident in a number of situations. I am going to take you to one of them in a moment, and you will discover truth about family living in scripture.

Eugene Peterson writes,

A search of Scripture turns up one rather surprising truth: there are no exemplary families [that show us a father, mother, and children], portrayed in a way that evokes admiration. There are many family stories, there is considerable reference to family life, and there is sound counsel to guide the family, but not one model family is given for anyone to look up to in either awe or envy.

It is true – there is not a scriptural model family from Adam and Eve to Noah to Joseph and his brothers to David to Samuel . . . to the family of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ own half brothers and sisters, as Mark’s gospel informs us, thought Jesus had lost His mind and came to interrupt His teaching and take Him away.

Peterson concluded by writing,

The biblical material consistently portrays the family, not as a Norman Rockwell painting around a Thanksgiving turkey, but as a series of broken relationships in need of redemption.ⁱⁱ

Perhaps that is the more important point that God wanted to communicate in His word. Perhaps He intended to communicate that there is no such thing as a model family and there is no such thing as a perfect parent. Not one. In fact, if you are under the delusion that you qualify, give me five minutes with your children.

About the time I think I have something fastened down pretty tight, it springs a leak and I am brought back to reality.

I remember one incident when our oldest daughter was about four or five. We were eating supper and it was near the end of the meal. For some reason my daughter began looking up at me with apparent admiration. She scooted her chair close to mine and periodically looked up at me and at my dinner. I was thinking to myself, “This is a great father-daughter moment. Look at her admiring me.”

Finally, she interrupted her staring as I ate, by saying, “I know why you’re the daddy!”

I put my fork down, as I swelled up even further with pride, and said, “Why is that, honey?”

She said, “Cause you’ve got the biggest mouth.”

Evidently she was simply amazed with how much food I could stuff in my mouth at one time!

When it comes to parenting, no one needs to apply for hero status. There is not a perfect model among us, nor will you find one in sixty-six inspired books of Holy Scripture. However, the Bible has a lot to say about parenting, family, and relationships – frequently from a negative example. I am looking forward to studying further with you, along the lines of how to build a house on the rock.

Model Words from a Not So Model Dad

If anyone does not qualify for model status as a daddy, it would be King David. He seemed to ruin more relationships than he repaired.

Yet, if you study David’s life, you discover that one of the most commendable things about him was not that he did not sin, but that he knew how to confess. If he modeled anything well, it was repentance.

If you put David’s life on a graph, you would find that he repeatedly went through three stages – intimacy with God, sinful behavior, and repentance. In fact, someone said that David’s life was a roller coaster of:

- intimacy, sin, repentance;
- intimacy, sin, repentance;
- intimacy, sin, repentance.

I want to take you – especially fathers – today, to one of David’s moments of intimacy with God. In fact, it is one of the highest mountain peaks of his spiritual life.

David is about to have a conversation with the new king – his son, Solomon. What he has to say is powerful in any generation.

If you are looking for a model of fatherhood, you will not find a perfect model in the man, David. However, you are about to hear it in the message of David to his son.

I invite you to turn to the thirteenth book in the Old Testament; that is, the book of I Chronicles. Look at chapter 28, verse 1. Notice the audience in this verse.

Now David assembled at Jerusalem all the officials of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the commanders of the divisions that served the king, and the commanders of thousands, and the commanders of hundreds, and the overseers of all the property and livestock belonging to the king and his sons, with the officials and the mighty men, even all the valiant men.

What a scene! This audience is all the “brass” – dignitaries and leaders – and all the people were evidently witnesses as well, according to chapters 28 and 29. This will be one of David’s finest hours.

This is David’s farewell speech. It articulated his passion for God and the things of God. You do not have to look very hard at this speech to immediately recognize the power of his words as he closes out forty years of leadership.

At some point, in front of this great crowd, David turns and personally addresses Solomon. Look at verses 9 and 10.

As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever. Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be courageous and act.

Within a matter of days, David will pass away.

Would that we would all deliver to our sons and daughters such words of both physical and spiritual challenge, inspiration, and hope.

Four timeless, effective, needed elements in David’s farewell speech to his son

Let us examine David’s words for a few moments. There are four elements in David’s farewell speech that are timeless, effective, and desperately needed for every father.

Communication of personal faith

1. First, there is the communication of personal faith.

Did you notice what David said in verse 9? “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your grandfather . . .”. “As for you, my son Solomon, you need to passionately follow the God of your mother. You’ve seen her worship God, haven’t you?”

No! In spite of David’s failure; in spite of David’s flaws and his sin – though he had failed God, God had not failed him. And David knew that! So he said, “Solomon, follow after the only true and living God. You’ve seen me worship Him; you’ve heard my tears of confession before Him; you’ve seen me pray to Him. I commend you to worship Him too!”

I found it fascinating to read this past week, the statistics sent to me by someone in the church. These statistics were regarding church attendance by children, depending on their parents involvement. One research group polled thousands of families and churches to discover the following facts:

- When Mom is a regular churchgoer, but Dad attends infrequently, only 3% of their children go on to become involved with the church as adults. Only 3%.
- When Dad, however, is regularly involved, whether or not Mom ever even attends, 44% of the kids end up involved in the church.

I do not mean to discourage faithful mothers. Do not forget the rare illustration of a godly mother and grandmother who raised one of the early church’s greatest pastor teachers named Timothy.

However, I really want this statistic to sink into the minds and hearts of dads. There is an unmistakable power of influence by the father over the attitude of your child toward the things of God.

Even the Department of Health and Human Resources in a secular culture is now admitting the obvious impact of a father’s presence and example. That leads them to say, “They’re your kids . . . be their dad.”

How? The word of God tells you how!

Communicate to your child a testimony of personal faith.

Let me ask,

- Is Colonial a church, a nice church, or is it your church?
- Is the Bible a Bible, one of the family Bibles, or do you have your Bible?
- Is it *your* walk . . . *your* worship . . . *your* testimony . . . *your* faith?

Fathers, can you look your children in the eye and say, “Follow the God you see me following,” and know your child will not be thinking, “Yea, right.”

Children know if we really buy into this thing called Christianity or if we just play a game of Sunday church.

David could honestly say, “Solomon, follow your daddy’s God. He is for real . . .”

Challenge of personal submission

2. Notice secondly, this farewell speech to Solomon not only includes the communication of personal faith, but also includes the challenge of personal submission.

Look at the second phrase in verse 9.

. . . and serve Him [God] with a whole heart and a willing mind;

You may be tempted to say, “Well, that’s easy for David to say – he had it made! He was the king, God was good – he got his way. David tended to be the hero in many accounts; such as with Goliath, the bear and lion, the Philistines, King Saul. No wonder David served God – God let David have his way.”

No, He did not. Go back to verse 2.

Then King David rose to his feet and said, “Listen to me, my brethren and my people; I had intended [this was in my heart] to build a permanent home for the ark of the covenant of the Lord and for the footstool of our God. So I made preparations to build it.

What kind of preparations? Look at verses 11 through 19.

Then David gave to his son Solomon the plan of the porch of the temple, its buildings, its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms and the room for the mercy seat;

and the plan of all that he had in mind, for the courts of the house of the Lord, and for all the surrounding rooms, for the

storehouses of the house of God and for the storehouses of the dedicated things;

also for the divisions of the priests and the Levites and for all the work of the service of the house of the Lord and for all the utensils of service in the house of the Lord;

for the golden utensils, the weight of gold for all utensils for every kind of service; for the silver utensils, the weight of silver for all utensils for every kind of service;

and the weight of gold for the golden lampstands and their golden lamps, with the weight of each lampstand and its lamps; and the weight of silver for the silver lampstands, with the weight of each lampstand and its lamps according to the use of each lampstand;

and the gold by weight for the tables of showbread, for each table; and silver for the silver tables;

and the forks, the basins, and the pitchers of pure gold; and for the golden bowls with the weight for each bowl; and for the silver bowls with the weight for each bowl;

and for the altar of incense refined gold by weight; and gold for the model of the chariot, even the cherubim that spread out their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the Lord.

“All this,” said David, “the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern.”

That kind of preparation.

The passionate desire of David’s heart was to build a house for the glory of God’s presence; to replace the movable tabernacle with a permanent temple. And after fifteen years of fighting other nations, the nation of Israel experienced peace and David went to Nathan with his carefully drawn plans. Nathan, the prophet of God, said, “Yes, you can build it.”

However, God came to Nathan that night and said, “You didn’t ask Me; you just assumed David was the man to build the temple. I want Solomon to build the temple, so go back to David and tell him the answer is not “Yes,” but “No.”

You need to understand that David’s passion was not to be a soldier for God, but a builder for God. This was his life-long ambition. When he lay in bed

at night, he was not dreaming up battle plans, he was drawing up building plans. And God said, “No.”

Notice verse 3.

But God said to me, “You shall not build a house for My name because you are a man of war and have shed blood.”

Wait a second! Those battles were the will of God. David was a man of war because he had the courage and faith to trust God and drive the enemies of God from the land. Every time David swung his sword, God received the glory!

Now, God says, “Because you swung the sword, you can’t build the house.”

Ladies and gentlemen, what Solomon and everyone else in that audience that day saw was the surrender and submission of David to the will of God – more clearly perhaps than in anything else. Why? Because the depth of our submission to God is not revealed in responding to God’s affirmatives, but to God’s negatives.

How do we act when God says, “No”?

Perhaps God has communicated, through His providence, the word “No” to one of your dreams. Maybe He has closed the door on a certain career, or ministry, or relationship.

David had intended to build!

Submission means relinquishing it; letting it go; giving the dream back to God.

Caution of personal accountability

3. Thirdly, there is the caution of personal accountability.

David goes on to remind Solomon, in the middle part of verse 9.

. . . for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. . . .

It is as if David is repeating a lesson he learned the hard way.

- If anyone knew the piercing gaze of a holy God, it was David.
- If anyone knew there was no such thing as a secret from God, it was David.
- If anyone knew the lasting, bitter consequences of murder and adultery, David did.

It is as if he is saying to Solomon, “Listen, son, live transparently before God – He knows everything anyway!”

There is the sense of protection that comes from a father – and mother – who know the danger of sin, right?!

You realize your children can learn about the consequences of sin in one of two ways:

- through personally experiencing them;
- through being warned of them and staying away.

You may tell your child, “If you touch that hot stove, you’ll get hurt.”

Your child can then learn that truth in one of two ways. He can:

- reach out, touch the hot stove, and get hurt;
- listen to the truth of your warning, and never touch it.

When it comes to sin, experience is the worst teacher in the world. Instruction and warning are the best.

Dads, set up safeguards, interact, warn, and guard your children with curfews, guidelines, and standards!

- If you are raising young men, warn them of many things, right?
- If you have daughters, warn them of young men, right?

I love the answer that Hall-of-Famer Charles Barkley gave to a reporter who asked him how he was going to handle his twelve year old daughter’s future boyfriends. Barkley said, “I figure, if I kill the first one, word will get around.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In the parallel passage of I Kings, chapter 2, David delivers these words to Solomon, in verse 3,

. . . keep His [God’s] statues, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses . . .

In other words, “Study the word of God; stay in this Book; search out God’s precepts, insights, commands, and ordinances.”

This Bible is a rock – build your house on this rock.

Commendation of personal destiny

4. Fourthly, give your children the commendation of personal destiny.

Listen as David continues his personal charge to Solomon in verse 10 of I Chronicles, chapter 28,

Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be courageous and act.

Imagine this, “Solomon, God has chosen you to build the temple.”

Wow! Imagine the blessing for Solomon to hear his dad say the words, “God has a plan for your life – chosen especially for you.”

That is true to this day, whether we know the specifics of the plan or not.

Tell your son or daughter, “God has designed you for a special purpose in life; He has His eye on you for a unique task. I can’t wait to see how God is going to use you for His glory. Follow Him; be

courageous. When you find out what it is, do it. It’s worth it.”

I wonder how many sons and daughters hear from their father’s lips the message that God has a plan for their lives?!

I wonder how many fathers welcome their children into the world, convinced that God is worth following?!

Conclusion

These are your kids . . . be their dad!

How?

- communicate personal faith;
- challenge them to personal submission;
- caution them with the reminder of personal accountability;
- give them the commendation of personal destiny.

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ⁱ United States Department of Health and Human Services, Fatherhood Initiative (Washington, D. C., 1999).

ⁱⁱ Eugene H. Peterson, Like Dew Your Youth (Eerdmans, 1994), p. 110.

ⁱⁱⁱ Newsweek, (June 18, 2001), p. 17.