

# DAD IS IN THE HOUSE, Pt 2

## STANDING IN HUMILITY

### *Finding Inner Strength*

By Rev. Will Nelken

*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, June 10, 2007*

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*Proverbs 22:6 (NLT) Teach your children to choose the right path, and when they are older, they will remain upon it. (NASB: "will not depart from it.")*

Many have depended on this as a promise from God and claimed it in prayer during difficult times. If their children wandered from their faith, they imagined that it could only be temporary, because the promise assures their faithfulness in later years.

Commonly, parents will figure out what seems to them to be the best or right way to live out *their* faith and then try to train their children to do the same, hoping they will one day own it as their own and ultimately follow it throughout their adulthood.

What is so confusing is that so many children appear to "depart from it" anyway, often long before their adulthood.

Why is that? Perhaps the promise just doesn't work reliably. Or, perhaps we have not understood or applied this Scripture properly.

#### **One Size Does Not Fit All**

What should be abundantly evident, except in one-child homes, is that each child is unique, and sometimes very different from the other children in the same home. Clearly, then, one generic application of household rules will not work for all the children in the family.

Moreover, even in one-child homes, rules applied rigidly often suffer backlash and rebellion, no matter how righteous the rules.

"Right path" or wrong path, George Barna's surveys reveal that the majority of adults in America believe essentially the same things they believed when they were just 13 years of age. They have not departed from them. These findings seem to support the second half of the proverb. What about the first half?

The rules themselves are not unimportant, but what is more important for our subject today is the manner of application. A parent's *manner* of training children is most significant as far as the children's follow-through in later years, whatever the rules may be.

The Bible's proverbs presuppose parental training that is biblical and godly. The issue that is confronted is *how* parents conduct that training. A better understanding of this proverb might be stated this way:

"Teach your children to choose the path that is right, according to the tone of their individual personalities and gifts, and, because it is uniquely suited to them, they will still follow it when they are grown."

In summary, this is not a prescription for ritual indoctrination to guarantee a positive outcome. Rather, this is an appeal to sensitive and appropriate parenting, with strong hope, not merely for the parents' pleasure, but primarily for the child's well-being and stability in years to come.

*How* we raise our children is so important! The litany of statistics of fatherless children that I shared last week underscore a dad's vital role in this process.

Dads, you dare not leave this leadership skill to your wife (not that she is incapable or incompetent), for God has given *you* a significant role in training your children to choose the path that is right for them. They are looking to their dad for leadership, and the Holy Spirit and the Bible are available to help you lead them well.

Single moms, do not lose hope; the principles I share with you today will help you also to guide your children well and give you a similar assurance for their future.

Let's look first at what *not* to do, and then consider how to do it right.

### **Don't Do It This Way**

If you fail to recognize what is unique about each of your children — their personalities, abilities, and spiritual gifts — and how those distinctives guide you to discipline and instruct them, then you will surely aggravate them and have frequent conflicts.

Children are growing up to be somebody unique — somebody God designed. In order to grow, they *must* test their personalities and their abilities and their spiritual gifts. This stretches them and teaches them valuable practical lessons. Sometimes you will feel like they are simply testing your leadership or your patience, but if you look deeper, you will find they are really testing themselves and the arena of your relationship is the safest place to do it. If you refuse to take that deeper look, you will snap at them in anger, or you will over-protect them in fear. Both of these reactions effect a lock-down on their growth, which will exasperate them for sure. If it becomes your pattern, they will become embittered toward you. (This is the primary root of teenage rebellion.)

*Colossians 3:21 (NLT)* *Fathers, don't aggravate your children. If you do, they will become discouraged and quit trying.*

Of course, there are several other ways for dads to aggravate their children. Being physically absent too much of the time is one of them. Quality time is not a substitute for quantity of time; quantity should *include* quality.

Another source of aggravation is emotional absence. I know you're tired at the end of a full day, but that's just when your time with your children begins, so call on God for fresh strength and give them the emotional attention they need. Paul's counsel to the Corinthians may serve you well here: "*Even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual father.*" (1 Corinthians 4:15) Your children, too, have many teachers, but only one dad. They need your heart more than your head. Be there for them.

Discouraged kids can often be traced back to their dad's absence or poor emotional responses. When they're discouraged, they can't see a future for themselves; they lose direction and motivation. They "quit trying" by dropping out of school or work or life itself. Suicide is the number one cause of death among teenagers in America.

Yet another source of aggravation for children is bully dads. These are dads who delight to tease and humiliate their kids, or are over-competitive with them, delighting to win and to point out their children's weaknesses.

Why do some dads treat their children these ways? Perhaps their own history has led them to repeat the poor treatment they received, instead of receiving healing. Perhaps childish pride that they never outgrew. The repercussions of such foolishness, unfortunately, are costly.

Some dads are afflicted with genuine laziness; they imagine that children exist to serve their needs and do not realize that they are responsible before Almighty God for the proper leadership of their homes. Like the Savior Himself, we are called "to serve, not to be served."

Repeated aggravation leads to deep discouragement. What is the answer to this tragic association? Don't aggravate them, as the Scripture instructs. But what more? What can be done to *positively* influence your children?

### **The Way They Should Go**

*Ephesians 6:4 (NLT)* *And now a word to you fathers. Don't make your children angry by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction approved by the Lord.*

This is how it is done! This is how you "teach your children to choose the right path": with the discipline and instruction approved by the Lord.

We often think of discipline as punishment, a negative reaction to misbehavior. The Bible presents a different concept: discipline is the nurture and training of right behavior that takes place in a committed relationship.

From our school experience, we usually think of instruction as the transfer of information that takes place, primarily, by lecture. As a sad result, lecturing has become stereotypical of parenting methodology. Again, the Bible presents a contrast: instruction is the process of *interactive* correction, discussion, and advice.

God has given us good direction that will *not* aggravate or embitter our children. This is how to teach a child to choose the right path. And the best tool for the job is the Bible itself. The Bible gives us the *method* and the *instrument* to discipline and instruct our children well.

*2 Timothy 3:16 (TLB)* *The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives (discipline); it straightens us out and helps us do what is right (instruction).*

*2 Timothy 3:16 (NASB)* *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof (these are disciplinary), for correction, for training in righteousness (these are instructive).*

The kind of indoctrination that familiarizes children with the Scriptures (reading, quoting, memorizing, discussing) is useful, as long as it leaves them free to think for themselves and ask questions. Without such freedom, there can be no genuine interaction, no genuine inspiration, and no genuine spiritual growth. From of old we have been told this:

*Deuteronomy 11:19 (NLT)* *Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again.*

You should have conversations with your children in much the same way that Jesus had conversations with His disciples: here, there, and everywhere. Wherever life confronted them with perplexity or challenge, was an occasion for spiritual illumination and instruction.

If you always protect them from difficulty or risk, they will not be able to grow through challenges or pain. On the other hand, if you ignore or abandon them when they need your encouragement, they may not have the moral courage they need to make good choices.

Don't minimize or scoff at your children's struggles, but come alongside them, like the Lord does with you, and support them as they ask God for courage and grace to "choose the right path."

This is where your own inner strength will come from. God will guide you by His Word so that you may guide your children. Sometimes, it is your most difficult trials that generate your most touching illustrations of God's grace.

Dads, don't fake it with your kids, pretending that you have it all together in every situation. Dads make mistakes, and dads get confused and perplexed, too. Share those trials with your children and turn it into a learning experience for the whole family. Sometimes, it will be the faith of a child that turns the situation around — unless your pride prevents it.

## **Humble Headship**

The word "husband" may have an original meaning of "house band": the band around a house that kept its walls upright and preserved its stability. In any case, a father's place in the home certainly lends and preserves stability of the family and the well-being of each member. It also reminds us that a dad is more than a recipient of his family's care, but is himself the chief guardian and supplier of care for his family (and that's more than just "bringing home the bacon").

The Bible gives him the responsibility as head-of-house, a term defined by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in His relationship to His Bride, the Church. A Christian dad is a servant-leader: one who leads, not by command, but by *service*; one who has the respect of his household, not by demand, but by *deservingness*. Again, like Christ, his role is "to serve, not to be served."

The chief characteristic of a godly dad is humility. He cherishes and praises his wife, in front of their children and their friends. And he respects his children for the unique gifts that they are — not for what he can get from them or because of them, but for what he can contribute to who they are to become (God's purpose for their lives). With such nurture along the path, "when they are old, they will not depart from it."