

DAD IS IN THE HOUSE, Pt 3 THINKING OF YOU *Instilling Hope and Courage* By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, June 24, 2007

Two weeks ago, I offered you this paraphrase of Proverbs 22:6:

“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.”

This was an appeal to sensitive and appropriate parenting leadership, rather than a rigid and authoritarian approach.

I concentrated on the biblical warning to dads not to “aggravate” your children, and suggested instead to groom your children with godly discipline and instruction.

I defined these as:

DISCIPLINE: the nurture and training of right behavior that takes place in a *committed relationship*.

INSTRUCTION: the process of *interactive* correction, discussion, and advice.

We were reminded that the chief characteristic of a godly dad (or leader) is humility — that unique quality blend of submission and courage.

Today, I want to take you a little deeper, as we examine the kind of heart that generates those qualities and its only Source: the heart of our Heavenly Father.

For the simple truth is this: a godly father must be a man of God.

The characteristics that we admire in a good and godly father are only given by God and they are cultivated and sustained through a personal faith relationship with Jesus Christ.

Mindfulness

And the primary principle of godly fatherhood is this: a godly father is mindful of his children. That means that his children occupy his thoughts. He thinks of their welfare and he plans for their well-being.

God Himself is mindful of us. You are on His mind!

NKJV Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

The Lord thinks *toward* us; He is inclined in our direction and intends good for us. His thoughts are “How can I bring them peace?” and “How can I protect them from evil?” and “How can I assure them a bright future?”

The New Living Translation says, “I know the *plans* that I have for you...” and in many other places the word “thoughts” is replaced with “plans” to show that these are not random, involuntary thoughts, but intentional, reasoning thoughts.

Incidentally, attached to this revelation are a prediction and a promise that emphasize His inclination toward us:

NKJV Jeremiah 29:12 *Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.* ¹³ *And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*

Such thoughts will characterize a godly father’s relationship with his children. He, too, will incline himself toward them, desiring and planning for their peace and safety and a bright future.

As an example of a father’s inclination toward his children, let me tell you about my friend Bill, also a pastor. It was his routine to take each of his children out for lunch or a treat individually, once a month, on the date of their birthdays. What a way to show that they were on his mind! He gave them a treat and he gave them his time and full attention. Unfortunately, by the time I learned it from him, my kids were already grown and out of our home!

Guidance

You are in God’s thoughts *every* day, as He orders your steps and orchestrates your circumstances.

NLT Psalm 37:23 *The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.*

How appropriate to our talk today is the Good News Translation of that verse:

GNT Psalm 37:23 *The Lord guides people in the way they should go and protects those who please him.*

He trains us “in the way we should go.” God asks us to treat our children in the same way that He treats His.

He trains us by *guiding* us. According to your unique personality and gifting and abilities, he provides circumstances that suit you and call forth your best qualities.

Now, my ability to “provide circumstances” for my child is extremely limited; most of the time, I, too, am *subject* to circumstances, not in charge of them.

But, if I am aware of my child’s unique personality and gifting and abilities, I will be able better to recognize what God has arranged and can cooperate by gently nudging my child in the proper direction and encouraging the proper response, as the Holy Spirit is nudging him from the inside.

Cooperation

A father must work in tandem with the Spirit. As we heard last week, our children are not really ours, but His. Our parenting is temporary; His is eternal.

Therefore, our nudging must be gentle, not demanding or harassing or threatening. If we are not gentle, our children will not be able to hear the voice of the Spirit in their hearts, echoing our guidance. Distracted by our tone or emotion, they will react in fear or rebellion before they can think.

Gentleness is the expression of humility. A gentle tone honors the Holy Spirit’s oversight, leaving Him room to act, and encourages your child to respond thoughtfully and courageously.

Now, if you prefer a robotic obedience, you can yell and threaten, but that's not how your Heavenly Father treats you, nor is it the kind of obedience He seeks from you.

Nothing else begets love but love.

Sometimes I have wished that God were not so gentle with me, wouldn't let me get away with things, would demand my attention and obedience, but He is more interested in my *growth* than my performance, and that is not the way we grow.

We grow by struggling with our circumstances and our weaknesses. The very effort it requires — the struggle to overcome my own laziness and inconvenience and reluctance and discomfort and fear — is what builds my submission and faith and obedience and character.

Your children, too, must struggle — but with your attention and encouragement — in order to overcome and grow.

You cannot give them that encouraging attention if you are obsessively focused on their shortcomings or *your* pride is injured by their failures. You must focus on their potential (because of God's help) and their future (what they are becoming).

Thoughtfulness

The songwriter reflected on God's focus toward us with these words: "All My thoughts toward you are holy, full of love and grace." How does God think about you? The same way He teaches us to think about one another:

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Clearly, this is not aimless thinking, not daydreaming. This is intentional, harnessed, guided thinking.

Find those things that are true and noble and right. Look for those things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Recall those things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Contemplate them. Become familiar with them. Recognize them. Appreciate them. Approve them. Encourage them. Reward them. Celebrate them.

That's what God does toward you. That's what dads should do toward their children.

Wholesomeness

Finally, dads, hear this counsel from Apostle Paul:

NIV Ephesians 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Don't let unwholesome talk (demeaning, belittling, cutting, disrespectful) come out of your mouths. Don't let it! Even if you think it and feel like it, don't let it.

Instead, *do* say whatever will help and benefit someone by building them up.

Don't bring sorrow to the Holy Spirit — get rid of your bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, and every form of ill treatment.

Instead, *do* be kind and compassionate and forgiving.

And do these things because that is just how God, through Christ, has treated you.

Hold your children in your thoughts, nurture them there... just as God is thinking of you.