

THE CALL OF A FATHER

Ephesians 5:33-6:4

THE CALL OF A FATHER

TEXT: Ephesians 5:33-6:4

INTRODUCTION:

If you are like me you probably were not well prepared to be a father. As much as I try I don't have even one happy memory of my own father. I have seen photos when I was small sitting on my dad's lap, and I have often wished I could actually remember what that was like. My relationship with my father was one of physical and especially psychological abuse. Words that hurt.

I remember the day I became a father! My wife woke me from peaceful sleep to announce that she thought it was time. Off we rushed for the hospital feeling quite certain that we would not arrive in time. Another 12 hours would pass before I had the joy of holding my first-born daughter. I remember being overwhelmed by God's goodness to me. I have had that experience six times since!

Today the most treasured possessions, next to Christ are the members of my family.

There are many challenges of fatherhood. We live in a world that threatens our marriages our families and our children. We live in a culture that mocks biblical morality, glorifies sex and violence and laughs at drunkenness and debauchery.

“Men, the mere fact of fatherhood has endowed you with terrifying power in the lives of your sons and daughters, because they have an innate, God-given passion for you. The terrible fact is, we as fathers can either grace our children, or damn them with wounds that never seem to heal. Our society is filled with millions of daughters pathetically seeking the affection their father's never gave them. In the extreme there are a multitude of sons who were denied a healthy same-sex relationship with their father and are now spending the rest of their lives in search of their sexual identity via perversion and immorality.”¹

Our society is void of godly male leadership. There are some men who are a success as leaders in the company or marketplace but fail completely in the home.

WE ARE THE MEN!

¹ Kent Hughes, Disciplines of a Godly Man

The city of Ephesus was a center of pagan worship in the ancient world. It was nearly unknown in this culture for a father to interact with his children in a loving and nurturing relationship.

Most families were in shambles, and mutual love among family members was almost unheard of. A father's love for his children would have been hard even to imagine. By the Roman law of *patria-potestas* a father had virtual life and death power not only over his slaves but over his entire household. He could cast any of them out of the house, sell them as slaves, or even kill them—and be accountable to no one. A newborn child was placed at its father's feet to determine its fate. If the father picked it up, the child was allowed to stay in the home; if the father walked away, it was simply disposed of—much as aborted babies are in our own day. Discarded infants who were healthy and vigorous were collected and taken each night to the town forum, where they would be picked up and raised to be slaves or prostitutes.

A letter written in 1 B.C. by a man named Hilarion to his wife, Alis, reads, *“Heartiest greetings. Note that we are still even now in Alexandria. Do not worry if when all others return I remain in Alexandria. I beg and beseech you to take care of the little child, and as soon as we receive wages I will send them to you. If—good luck to you—you have another child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, expose it”* (Papyri Oxyrhynchus 4.744). Seneca, a renowned statesman in Rome at the time Paul wrote the Ephesian letter, said, *“We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge a knife into a sick cow. Children born weak or deformed we drown.”*²

And there is little difference in our day. The majority of children in foster care in the west are there not because their parents are dead, but because their parents abandoned them. In a society without God fatherhood always suffers.

Paul is writing to first-generation Christians! These Ephesian believers had been redeemed by God to the praise of His glory! In Christ they had been placed in a position of victory so that in the ages to come God might show forth the riches of His grace. These Ephesian believers had been brought into the body of Christ through the power of God! (Eph 1:11-13; 2:1-3; 4:17; 5:8)

Because of God's redemption and because of His grace toward the Ephesians they were to walk worthy of their calling as children of God.

What is God's call to fathers? Ephesians gives us God's instructions to fathers!

² MacArthur Commentary, Ephesians, p 318. John MacArthur

OUTLINE:

I. LOVE THEIR MOTHERS (5:33)

A. Christ commands it

1. Eros - Physical love = physical attraction between married couples (this word not used in the NT). The love commanded is more than just a wonderful feeling.
2. Storge - Family love = fondness people share with their relatives, especially that love between parents and children.
3. Philia - Friendship love = a warm hearted affection, attractive appeal between friends
4. Agape - Love of Choice = the desire for and delight in the well-being of the one loved that leads to self-sacrificing efforts on their behalf.

B. Christ demonstrates it

1. This is a sacrificial love (5:25, Ro. 5:8)
2. This is a serving love (5:26, Gal.5:13b)

II. TEACH THEM TO OBEY (6:1-3)

A. An unavoidable command - Children are to obey (Prov 22:6)

1. This is God's command to your children, it is not primarily yours.
2. Obedience = doing what you are supposed to do, when you are supposed to do it, how you are supposed to do it, with the right heart attitude toward the authority asking you to do it.
3. Teaching them to obey involves

B. A non-negotiable attitude - Honor them

1. Honor - give them due respect. (Note: God's order of Authority)
2. A child should never be allowed to tell the parent "no." Our goal is that our younger children honor us by responding the first time spoken to.
3. The general promise: it will be well with the child, and they will live a full life.

III. DO NOT FRUSTRATE THEM (6:4a)

A. Warning is given to Christian Fathers (Eph 1:1; 2:1-10)

1. "Do Not"! This is a command! (2:3 - in the past they lived like this now it is different!)

2. “Do not” is perfectly clear, do not provoke your children to anger so they begin to seethe with resentment and irritation.

B. How can we as fathers goad our children to resentment?

1. Criticism - Father’s who criticize their children often bring them to discouragement (Col. 3.21).
 - How do we as Father’s criticize our children? Negative comments, Never praise them, Backhanded praise. HURTFUL words - wounds that never heal.
 - A child needs the fathers approval and encouragement as much as he needs the father’s correction.
2. Irritability - Life is sometimes like the cartoon where the boss is grouchy toward the worker; his employee, in turn comes home and is irritable with the children; his son then kicked the dog; the dog runs down the street and bites the first person he sees – the boss!
3. Inconsistency - Pity the horse that has a rider who gives it mixed signals, digging his heels into its side and pulling the reins at the same time. Pity the child even more who has the rules changed by an unpredictable father.
 - Be consistent. Never make a promise to your children you do not keep. You may forget, but you have a little boy or girl who will remember it eighty years from now.
4. Unreasonable expectations: Never being pleased with the child’s achievement - pushing beyond reasonable bounds, by expectations. The child is never good enough.
5. Withholding Love - Manipulating your child by withholding your affection from the child. “If you don’t behave, I won’t love you anymore.” (Heb 12:6). We are not to discipline out of anger, retribution.
6. Physical Abuse - Child becomes the object of the father’s anger. Slap the child around, physically beat the child. Bully the sons, berate the daughters. Verbal abuse - often more damaging to a child than the physical abuse!

IV. NURTURE THEM TO MATURITY (6:4b)

In a society where many children are growing up without a father in the home, we as godly men - young and old alike must prayerfully and intentionally become “fathers” to the children around us. In a specific sense this text speaks

to biological fathers, in a general sense it provides us a template as men to disciple and be 'fathers' to the next generation.

Ephesians 6.4 when fully understood, requires us to do three things:

A. Tenderness

1. "Bring them up" means "to nourish or feed" as in 5.29. Bring them up = let them be kindly cherished (Calvin). It emphasizes the idea of speaking to one's children with gentleness and friendliness.
2. Tenderness – verbal and physical – comes naturally to a father living under God's Word. Men how do we measure up? (Col.3:21)

B. Discipline

1. "Training" encompasses everything necessary to help "*train a child in the way he should go*" (Pr. 22.6). It includes discipline by punishment.
 - Discipline - the process of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience. (Pr 13:24, Heb 12:5-11)
 - A child's heart is filled with folly, we are to discipline them to bring them to wisdom (Pr. 22:15). "*Don't expect a horse trained with shouts to respond to a whisper.*"
2. Failure to discipline will bring disaster to our children. David never disciplined his son, Adonijah (I Kn 1:5-6)
 - Many of us have left this for the child's mother or other family member. This approach leaves the child void of the security and self-esteem which come from being disciplined by the father.
 - Children are a heritage from the LORD, they are to be reared for HIM! (Ps 127:3)
 - Men, do you discipline your children? If not you are not living under God's Word!
3. Life Lessons
 - Don't make excuses for your sin or the sin of your children - The real problem is sin. Deal with the sin, don't excuse it. Be willing to deal with your children as sinners.
 - Our children must learn at an early age that there are painful consequences to sin.

- The problem cannot be solved by education – education just results in a sophisticated sinner (2.6; 22.19)
- Our children must learn from an early age that God has provided a solution for the sinner – salvation through Jesus Christ.

C. Instruction

1. “Instruction” is verbal instruction or warning. Literally it means to “place before the mind.” Often this means to confront and thus is related to the previous topic, discipline.
 - This is where the high priest Eli was such a failure in raising his children (1 Sam. 3.11-13).
 - The word restrain is the same word as instruction. Eli failed to confront his boys. He failed to instruct them about their sin and because of this they were destroyed.
2. Discipleship!! Men if we are to live up to our responsibilities we must Disciple our children by being:
 - Involved in verbally instructing our children - the well being of your great-grandchildren depend upon it! (Deut 6:7, Josh 24:15, 31, Judg 2:7,10)
 - Regularly leading them in family devotions and prayer.
 - Monitoring the input that enters their impressionable minds. (What music is he listening to? What is he/she watching?)
 - Taking responsibility to help ensure that church is a meaningful experience.
 - Above all to ensure that the open book of our lives – our example demonstrates the reality of our instruction, for in watching us they will learn the most. (Video: I’m Watching You Dad)

CONCLUSION:

- A. Men, what awesome power we have! Our children’s hearts are turned toward us! Our hearts must be turned toward them. (Ps 78:5-6)
- B. Seven Secrets of Effective Fathers Effective Fathers are:
 1. Committed to their children.
 2. Know their children.
 3. Are consistent in their attitudes and behavior.

The Call Of A Father

4. Protect and Provide for their children.
 5. Love their children's mother.
 6. Are active listeners to their children.
 7. Spiritually equip their children.
- C. A word of encouragement to Christian Mothers (II Tim 1:5).