

- ***READ Mark 10:17,18*** As Jesus is going along His way during His ministry, we read in this text that a man runs up, kneels before Him, refers to Him as *"Good Teacher"*, and then proceeds to ask Jesus a question. Jesus responds by making it known that there is truly one who is good and that is God alone. I am convinced that Jesus makes this statement with the fact in mind that He Himself is God, and therefore this man was actually referring to Jesus in a proper manner. Nonetheless, I want to focus our attention on the fact that Jesus refers to God as good. He is our good God, and I would also suggest that He is our Good Father.
- The impact that a good earthly father can have on the lives of his children cannot be understated. While I firmly believe that the role of a mother in the lives of her children is indispensable, but generally speaking the reality is that a father's influence upon his children cannot be matched. Consider this study that I recently came across.

Turn of the century Swiss study on a father's influence on his children's faith.

- ✓ If both father and mother attend regularly, 33% of their children will end up as regular churchgoers, and 41% will end up attending irregularly. Only a quarter of their children will end up not practicing at all.
- ✓ If the father is irregular and mother regular, only 3% of the children will subsequently become regulars themselves, while a further 59% will become irregulars. Thirty-eight% will be lost.
- ✓ If the father is non-practicing and mother regular, only 2% of children will become regular worshippers, and 37% will attend irregularly. Over 60% of their children will be lost completely to the church!
- ✓ What happens if the father is regular but the mother irregular or non-practicing? Amazingly, the percentage of children becoming regular goes up from 33% to 38% with the irregular mother and up to 44 % with the non-practicing. This suggests that loyalty to the father's commitment grows in response to the mother's laxity or indifference to religion.
- When I read such results of this study, there is one main takeaway that comes to mind and that is the fact that I, as a father, have a tremendous responsibility laid upon my shoulders when it comes to the impact that I am going to have on the faith of my children. I will have at least somewhat of an influence over who they are going to be when they grow up and go out on their own. Therefore, I must take seriously the way in which I am raising my children, and I must seek to lay out before them the proper example of a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.
- The example that I show them is going to generally be shaped through the way that I behave in my life, but it is also going to have a lot to do with how I treat them and behave towards them. If I can discipline myself to make sure that I am treating them rightly and behaving in a godly manner, then I can have at least some sense of peace in knowing that I have done what I can to show them the way that a good disciple is to behave. However, if I set the wrong example or if I treat them poorly, then why would they want to follow in my footsteps.
- Each and every father here this morning should have a burning desire to only give our children the proper Christian example to follow in everything that we do, and we can do that by following the example of our good Father who is in heaven. But before we get to His example, let's take a few minutes to consider some poor examples of parenting that exist within the Old Testament text. While there are some good examples of men who were good fathers, the unfortunately reality is that we have far too many examples of men who did not do well. Let's examine them firstly, and then we will move onto the sample that our good heavenly Father reveals to us through His Word.

I. There are many examples of poor fathering in the Scriptures.

A. Isaac and Jacob practiced favoritism among their sons.

1. Here is a perfect example of how one father's mistakes seem to directly affect the behavior of his son. In **Genesis 25:27,28** we read, *"When the boys grew up, Esau became an expert under, an outdoorsman, but Jacob was a quite man who stayed at home. Isaac loved Esau because he had a taste for wild game, but Rebekah loved Jacob."* This is such a classic example of a mother and father picking kids who are their favorite because they are more like them in different ways. Isaac is drawn towards the outdoorsman while Rebekah is drawn towards the homebody. While there is nothing wrong with enjoying shared interests and activities that a particular child might enjoy, we must be careful to not neglect the other children or cause them to be jealous of their siblings for the attention they get from their father. That jealousy and contempt that Jacob had for Esau is clearly seen in the way he shadily deals with him and his father.

2. The influence of Isaac on Jacob can also be seen in the way that Jacob also had his favorite son in Joseph. This favorite son was given something that none of his other eleven brothers had been given...a robe of many colors. *"When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not bring themselves to speak peaceably to him."* (**Genesis 37:3,4**) Many of us know the way that this turned out! Joseph's brothers eventually kidnap Joseph, fake his death, and sell him off to some traders. Many of the problems that Jacob's sons experienced could be traced back to the failures of Isaac with his sons.

B. Eli, Samuel, & David failed to discipline their sons.

1. One of the most important jobs of a father is to make sure that we are raising our children in a disciplined manner. We are to set the standard of their behavior (discipline proactively), and if they fail to keep to that standard then we are to offer correction (discipline reactively) to help them get to where they need to be. *"Don't withhold discipline from a youth; if you punish him with a rod, he will not die. Punish him with a rod, and you will rescue his life from Sheol."* (**Proverbs 23:13,14**)
2. This is so vitally important because failure to discipline our children can lead to harsh consequences in the future and even in the present. Consider how these three well-known Bible men failed to properly disciple their sons, and the horrible consequences that eventually came as a result of their failures to properly discipline.
 - a. Eli offered what seems to amount to a slap on the wrist to his sons though they were guilty of many transgressions. Among such were their sleeping with women who served at the tabernacle. The Lord accuses Eli of having, *"honored your sons more than me, by making yourselves fat with the best part of all of the offerings of my people."* (**I Samuel 2:22-29**)
 - b. Instead of replacing his wicked sons who were judging the people of Israel, Samuel continued to allow them to turn towards dishonest profit, take bribes, and pervert justice. (**I Samuel 8:1-9**)
 - c. For all of the great accomplishments of king David, one of his greatest failures must have been his unwillingness to discipline his sons when they acted foolishly and wickedly. Amnon went unpunished by David when he raped his brother Absalom's sister Tamar. Yes, the text tells us that David was furious, but we don't seem him rendering out any just punishment. For this, Absalom eventually kills Amnon himself before going on to revolt against David. (**II Samuel 13-18**)

C. Manassah & Ahaz delivered their children over to demons.

1. A couple of the most infuriating portions of the Bible must be the completely depraved actions of Manassah and Ahaz. Both of these men were failures in their faiths towards the Lord, and those failures it led them to failing their children in the most extreme way...they offered their children on the altar of demons.
2. The Bible says of Manassah: *"He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, imitating the detestable practices of the nations that the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had destroyed and reestablished the altars for Baal. He made an Asherah, as King Ahab of Israel had done; he also bowed in worship to all the stars in the sky and served them. He built altars in the Lord's temple, where the Lord had said, 'Jerusalem is where I will put my name.' He built altars to all the stars in the sky in both courtyards of the Lord's temple. **He sacrificed his son in the fire, practiced witchcraft and divination, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did a huge amount of evil in the Lord's sight, angering him.**"* (**II Kings 21:2-6**)
3. Of Ahaz the Bible states: *"Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. He did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God like his ancestor David but walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. **He even sacrificed his son in the fire, imitating the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites.**"* (**II Kings 16:2,3**)

D. Solomon taught well but seems to have failed in setting the proper example for his sons.

1. It ought to sadden us so much to know the wisdom that Solomon possessed and shared with others all while failing to follow his own wise advice. All throughout the Proverbs, we see such wise advice going out from Solomon's mind to the reader, and it is advice that he himself would have done very well to consider and follow himself...especially when it came to women.

2. All of **Proverbs 5** and **Proverbs 5:20-7:27** is written to help the young man understand and avoid the pitfalls that come with falling into lust and infatuation with women. And yet...it is Solomon himself of whom it is written, *"King Solomon loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh's daughter: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women from the nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, and they must not intermarry with you, because they will turn your heart away to follow their gods." To these women Solomon was deeply attached in love. He had seven hundred wives who were princesses and three hundred who were concubines, and they turned his heart away. When Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away to follow other gods. He was not wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord his God, as his father David had been. Solomon followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom, the abhorrent idol of the Ammonites. Solomon did what was evil in the Lord's sight, and unlike his father David, he did not remain loyal to the Lord."* (I Kings 11:1-6)

II. We must look to our heavenly Father for the good and proper example of how we should father.

A. Our heavenly Father is impartial.

1. The impartiality with God works in multiple ways. Firstly, God will justly repay anyone for whatever it is that they do in this life. *"There will be affliction and distress for every human being who does evil, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does what is good, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For there is no favoritism with God."* (Romans 2:9-11)
2. Additionally, God is patient and desires to give all people opportunity to repent and turn to Him. *"The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance."* (II Peter 3:9)
3. Lastly, God wants to give all people that which will help them to serve Him well. *"Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord, being double-minded and unstable in all his ways."* (James 1:5-8)
4. Therefore, we must follow in the footsteps of God and make sure that we are showing equal amounts of love towards each of our children so that they each feel the love that we ought to have for each one of them individually. We don't ever want for any of our kids to feel as if we love another over them. Sure, we might find more common ground with one over the other, but we must make sure that we find ways to make each of our kids feel loved and special in our eyes. If God is willing to treat each of us equally, then we must do the same for all of our kids.

B. Our heavenly Father disciplines us.

1. Just as our heavenly Father expects for us to train and discipline our children in His ways (**Ephesians 6:4**), so does He seek to train and discipline us when the need arises. The Hebrew writer makes this abundantly clear in **Hebrews 12:3-11**. Notice that he establishes the discipline of the Lord, and then he compares that to the discipline handed down to us by our earthly fathers. *"We had human fathers discipline us, and we respected them. Shouldn't we submit even more to the Father of spirits and live?...He does it for our benefit, so that we can share His holiness."*
2. While there might be ways that God providentially disciplines us when we need it, it is without a doubt that God seeks to discipline and train us through His word. He seeks to mold us and shape us into the people that he desires for us to be, and sure it might be absolutely true that He correctively disciplines us in certain ways when we get off track. Point being...He does this all for us because He loves us and desires for us to be right in His sight.
3. Likewise, we must be fathers who greatly desire for our own children to walk in the ways that would most benefit them which of course is in service to God. However, fathers...we cannot do this if we are not around! Absentee fathering is a plague on our society, and it must not be said about us that we are absent from our children's lives because we are off doing other things. Yes, we have to provide for our families, but I'll always argue that there is nothing more vital to provide to our families than spiritual leadership and direction. We achieve nothing by gaining the world and losing our own children to it.

C. Our heavenly Father protects us

1. As His children, God is mightily concerned with helping us to be what we know He desires for us to be. For this reason, we read in **Romans 8:26** that God's Spirit seeks to intercede for us when we are struggling. For this reason, we read of God carrying out His plan for our salvation. **(Romans 8:28-30)** For this reason, we find God affirming to us in this same text, *"What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He did not even spare His own Son but offered Him up for us all. How will He not also with Him grant us everything?"*
2. As the text continues on, we come to realize that no matter the difficult that comes our way...God is there ready to intercede for us, strengthen us, and preserve us in every way imaginable. If we are children who truly put every ounce of our faith and trust in Him, then we can rest assured knowing that He will protect us from the clutches of the evil one. This doesn't mean that we won't suffer for doing what is righteous, but it means that we will never be defeated so long as we lean upon our heavenly Father for the strength that He provides.
3. Father...how far are we willing to go in order to protect our children from the temptation and dangers of this world? If God was so willing to give His only Son for us, then we must be willing to go all the way in order to protect our children when they need our help. We must be willing to sacrifice time, energy, resources, personal desires, and any other thing that is necessary in order to protect our children from that which would seek to harm them. We must shepherd the sheep that are in our own homes! God has entrusted to us precious souls who are like little sheep in need of protection, and it is our job to protect them with every ounce of strength that the Lord will provide to us.

D. Our heavenly Father not only teaches us, but He also sets the proper example.

1. Just as Solomon was careful to share with his sons all of the God-given wisdom that was within his heard, God seeks to give us everything that we need in order to be fully equipped and able to serve Him in an acceptable manner. He does so through the teaching, rebuking, correction, and training that can be found in His inspired word. **(II Timothy 3:16,17)**
2. However, unlike Solomon, God also seeks to set the proper example for us. While we might not have the Father's earthly actions to look to as examples to follow...we do have God in the form of Jesus to look to as the example which we are to follow. *"For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He did not commit sin, and **no deceit was found in his mouth**; when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. **By his wounds you have been healed.** For you **were like sheep going astray**, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."* **(I Peter 2:21-25)** We are to follow the example of Jesus for He is the embodiment of God's great love that He has for us. He sets the example for all of the teachings that can be found within God's written will for us.
3. Fellow fathers...the whole schtick of *"Do as I say and not as I do"* isn't going to cut it! We must be men of integrity who are doing everything we can to make sure that we are not just teaching our kids correctly, but we must be men who are setting the proper example to go along with the lessons that we are teaching on a daily basis. We can never underestimate the value of our children seeing us walk the talk.

In a world where there are plenty of poor examples of fathers (Bible fathers included), I can't tell you how thankful I am to have the two men in my life that have influenced me in ways I can hardly express in words. Unfortunately, I know that not every person can say they have enjoyed such a blessing, but I have good news for those who find themselves in that unfortunate position...There is a perfect heavenly Father who desires to have you as His son or daughter even today, and the best news is that He will never let you down. I will eventually let my girls down in one way or another, but I hope above all else that I point them towards a Father who never will. Thank God for the good fathers who are in our lives, but I thank Him most of all for His role in being our truly good Father.