



## SOMEONE SPECIAL

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(1 Chronicles 3:1)

A

ny man can become a father, but it takes a special man to be a dad."

In September of 1971, just a few hours after our first baby was born, a close friend handed me a greeting card with the above inscription printed on the front. Earlier that morning I had become "any man." *I'm a father!* I whispered to myself. *Now what am I going to do?*

My primary training for this day came from my own parents. From the time I was small, I had watched them negotiate conflict among themselves. They loved and honored each other and this mutual respect gave my siblings and me a great sense of security. We knew our dad and mother had always consulted one another first.

From their example, I learned the most important thing any father can learn. It's the secret to successfully making the transition from father to dad and, amazingly, it has nothing to do with parenting skills. The secret to being a great dad is for a man to always love and serve his wife—his children's mother—first.

Missing this truth is as dangerous as a coach preparing his team for the game next week rather than the one this week. It's as treacherous as a sailor studying the weather maps for tomorrow's forecast instead of preparing for the storm today.

Proverbs 17:6 tantalizes a man with the possibility of being the "glory" of his children. However, being a great dad isn't achieved by pursuing fathering greatness; it's the byproduct—the investment dividend—of a selfless commitment to a successful marriage.

### SEVEN TACTICAL STEPS TO BECOMING A GREAT DAD

Once a man has determined that his love for his wife is his priority, he then needs to build a game plan for success as a dad.

#### 1. Protection: Love Stands Guard

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go" (Ps. 32:8). One of the most amazing things that God has built into parents is the need to protect their young. A dad's job is to guard his children physically when they're young and defenseless, and emotionally as they grow and mature. This protection spans every conceivable dimension, from teaching his son to respect power tools to interviewing the boys who intend on taking his daughter out for a date.

#### 2. Conversation: Just Keep Talking

"[Joseph] kissed all his brothers and . . . [they] talked with him" (Gen. 45:15). Giving his children the things they need is the job of every dad. The most precious gift, however, isn't a *thing*, it's a *skill*. That skill is the art of conversation. When his children are young, learning to ask good questions and listening carefully to their answers builds a bridge that connects their hearts for a lifetime. And, by the way, a dad needs to learn to listen with his eyes as well as his ears!

#### 3. Affection: The Power of Touch

"[Jesus] took [the children] up in His arms" (Mark 10:16). There may be nothing more

important for a dad to learn than to understand the power of holding his children. A dad's touch communicates security and worth to a little person's heart. Not being satisfied with simply greeting the children with a smile and a nod, Jesus also touched them.

#### 4. *Discipline: Love Must Be Painful*

"For whom the LORD loves He corrects" (Prov. 3:12). Discipline is both a verb and a noun. A dad's goal is to be able to say, "My children have discipline." That's the noun—and guess where it comes from. That's right—discipline, the verb. When children learn the rigors of discipline—modeled by a father with *self-discipline*—their lives are filled with the confidence of having discipline.

#### 5. *Laughter: Fun to Live With*

"A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance" (Prov. 15:13). Admit it. Most men are . . . well, they're *boring*. We're too task-oriented, too focused, and too preoccupied to be any fun. And what can we do about this? Years ago, I went to a bookstore and found some help. I bought riddle books, cartoon books, and humor books. We watched a little less television, read those books, and played a few more games that didn't plug into a wall or need batteries. It worked.

#### 6. *Faith: Jesus Loves Me*

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). There may be no more horrible word in the English language than the word "lost." And there may be no more wonderful word than the word "found." Every dad begins his life as a lost man. Only Jesus Christ has the power to truly find—save—that man. When a dad discovers this, then lives it before his family, nothing is ever the same again.

#### 7. *Conduct: Loving Well, Living Right*

"For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!" (Rom. 6:14, 15). My uncle Allon Dourte was a master fruit grower. His apples and peaches were the envy of farmers from nearly every surrounding zip code. Ironically, Uncle Allon spent very little time working on his fruit. Instead, most of his effort was spent on the health of the trees—pruning, spraying, and fertilizing. Good conduct is good fruit. Protection, conversation, affection, discipline, laughter, and faith make for good kids.

#### **FURTHER MEDITATION:**

Other passages to study about the issue of fatherhood include:

- > Deuteronomy 6:6-9
- > Proverbs 17:6
- > Ephesians 6:4
- > Colossians 3:21

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To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on fatherhood at Ephesians 6:4 on page 1558. See also the personality profile of the prodigal son's father on page 1348.

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<sup>4</sup>And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

#### BONDSERVANTS AND MASTERS

<sup>5</sup>Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to

Christ; <sup>6</sup>not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, <sup>7</sup>with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men. <sup>8</sup>knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is a slave or free.*

<sup>9</sup>And you, masters, do the same things to



Fatherhood

#### KEY PASSAGE

### DEAR OLD DAD

(6:4)

Paul here addressed just fathers, but obviously, mothers can use this same advice. Fathers are responsible for their children, to "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." All fathers should be working toward the goal of raising God-honoring children. Because all fathers are different, with varying backgrounds, personalities, and ideas, they will do this in many different ways. Yet they ought to be careful in their training and discipline not to provoke their children "to wrath." In other words, sometimes a father's discipline can be overly harsh, unfair, unloving, or irresponsible, causing children to become angered, discouraged, and resentful. A father who disciplines fairly, consistently, and lovingly is raising his children well. Dads also have the huge responsibility of modeling to their children what their heavenly Father is like. What an incredible opportunity and responsibility!

To Learn More: Turn to the article about fatherhood on pages 516, 517. See also the personality profile of the prodigal son's father on page 1348.



Spiritual Warfare

#### KEY PASSAGE

### THE WINNING TEAM

(6:10-20)

The spiritual realm has two sides—God's side and Satan's side. Those who have accepted Christ as Savior are on God's side; that automatically makes them enemies of Satan. This passage says that our battle is against "the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." These forces are real and powerful and should not be underestimated. Their goal is to make believers ineffective for God's kingdom and to keep unbelievers away from God.

The battle rages constantly, usually beyond our earthly vision. At times, however, we see it clearly when we face temptation, difficulty, and trials. Evil knows our weaknesses; Satan knows where to attack. Our strength for the battle is in God. We need to "suit up" with God's armor so that we can be ready when Satan attacks. Wearing God's armor, we fight our daily battles, trusting God to fight with us through His Holy Spirit. The war has already been won, and we are on the winning side!

To Learn More: Turn to the article about spiritual warfare on pages 1560, 1561. See also the personality profile of Michael the archangel on page 1708.

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God. <sup>13</sup>For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal<sup>a</sup> for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. <sup>14</sup>Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. <sup>15</sup>Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his<sup>a</sup> house.

odiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. <sup>17</sup>And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

<sup>18</sup>This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen.

#### CLOSING EXHORTATIONS AND BLESSING

<sup>16</sup>Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the La-

**4:13** <sup>a</sup>NU-Text reads *concern* **4:15** <sup>a</sup>NU-Text reads *Nympha . . . her house*.

#### KEY PASSAGE



#### Marital Problems

### THE POWER OF LOVE

(3:18, 19)

**Marriages have problems for various reasons. An attitude of love and service, each person toward the other, can go a long way toward solving many of the irritations and difficulties that can arise. Wives are told to submit to their husbands, willingly allowing their husbands the position of leadership over the family. Husbands, in turn, are told to love their wives sacrificially, as Christ loved the church.**

A wise and Christ-honoring wife seeks her husband's best—serving, helping, comforting, and supporting him as he assumes the God-given role of head of the household. When a wife treats her husband that way, providing a haven at home, she has done him great good. A wise and Christ-honoring husband seeks his wife's best as a godly and loving leader—serving, helping, comforting, and supporting her as she carries out her role in the home (and perhaps in a workplace as well). Most marital problems find healing in mutual love, submission, and respect.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about marital problems on pages 1576, 1577. See also the personality profile of Isaac and Rebekah on page 42.

#### SOUL NOTE



**Helpful, Not Harmful (3:21)** Fathers are told not to discourage their children. Although children are commanded to obey their parents, this does not give parents permission to be cruel or unreasonable in their treatment of their children. Parents who nag, belittle, or deride their children destroy their self-esteem and discourage them. The purpose of parental discipline is to train children. Consistent discipline, administered with love, will help children to grow into responsible adults. **Topic: Fatherhood**

Seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. <sup>20</sup>Now a mediator does not *mediate* for one *only*, but God is one.

<sup>21</sup>Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. <sup>22</sup>But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. <sup>23</sup>But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. <sup>24</sup>Therefore the law was our tutor to *bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup>But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

#### SONS AND HEIRS

<sup>26</sup>For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup>For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup>And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

**4** Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, <sup>2</sup>but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. <sup>3</sup>Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. <sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born<sup>a</sup> of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

<sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God has sent

forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" <sup>7</sup>Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of<sup>a</sup> God through Christ.

#### FEARS FOR THE CHURCH

<sup>8</sup>But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. <sup>9</sup>But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? <sup>10</sup>You observe days and months and seasons and years. <sup>11</sup>I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

<sup>12</sup>Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I *became* like you. You have not injured me at all. <sup>13</sup>You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. <sup>14</sup>And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, *even* as Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>What<sup>a</sup> then was the blessing you *enjoyed*? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. <sup>16</sup>Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

<sup>17</sup>They zealously court you, *but* for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. <sup>18</sup>But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you. <sup>19</sup>My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, <sup>20</sup>I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.

4:4 <sup>a</sup>Or *made* 4:7 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text reads *through God* and omits *through Christ*. 4:15 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text reads *Where*.

#### SOUL NOTE



**Being Dad** (4:6) "Abba, Father" describes believers' intimate relationship with God. As children love their fathers and yet respect and obey them, so believers love God and have respect for and awe of Him. At times, people's unhappy relationships with their earthly fathers inhibit their ability to understand the loving fatherhood of God. This puts a great responsibility on fathers to seek the guidance of the perfect Father as they raise their children. Christian fathers should raise their children with love and discipline. This will help their children to have a healthy concept of God.

**Topic: Fatherhood**



on his neck and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

<sup>22</sup>"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring<sup>a</sup> out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; <sup>24</sup>for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

<sup>25</sup>"Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>So he called one of the servants and asked what these things

meant. <sup>27</sup>And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'

<sup>28</sup>"But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup>So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood

15:22 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text reads *Quickly bring*.

#### PERSONALITY PROFILE



### THE PRODIGAL SON'S LOVING FATHER

(LUKE 15:11)

#### Fatherhood

The Parable of the Prodigal Son follows two other parables that Jesus told in response to some critics. They were upset about the people with whom He was spending time. His crime? "This Man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). All three parables illustrate the high value that God places on an individual life. A wayward sheep, a wayward coin and a wayward son are each "found" and become the reason for celebration. God plays a different character in each parable: the owner of the flock, the owner of the coins, and the father of two sons.

Parables have an amazing capacity for affecting different members of an audience in very different ways. The Parable of the Prodigal may offer a younger brother, an older brother, or a father startling and varied insights. Although the most active role in this parable falls to the younger brother, the father proves to be the central actor. The character of this father, who represents our Heavenly Father, demonstrates a number of significant lessons for earthly fathers:

- > He provided a caring model for his sons.
- > He provided financial and emotional support for his sons.
- > He gave them the blessing of a heritage.
- > He guided but did not force his sons to conform.
- > He gave them room to fail and a place to return.
- > He exercised mercy and grace toward his children.
- > He met his children more than half way.
- > He forgave.

The two brothers in Jesus' parable represent opposite ends of a continuum of children's characters from passivity to action. The list above offers earthly fathers significant help in relating to the differences in their children as well as guidance about the consistency that sons and daughters need to observe in their fathers. Wise earthly fathers exercise humility and persistence as they seek to imitate their Heavenly Father in their special role. Only One does it perfectly; the rest dare not do less than their best.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about fatherhood on pages 516, 517. See also the key passage note at Ephesians 6:4 on page 1558.

- 4 An evildoer gives heed to false lips;  
A liar listens eagerly to a spiteful  
tongue.
- 5 He who mocks the poor reproaches his  
Maker;  
He who is glad at calamity will not go  
unpunished.
- 6 Children's children *are* the crown of old  
men,  
And the glory of children *is* their father.
- 7 Excellent speech is not becoming to a  
fool,  
Much less lying lips to a prince.
- 8 A present *is* a precious stone in the eyes  
of its possessor;  
Wherever he turns, he prospers.
- He who covers a transgression seeks  
love,  
But he who repeats a matter separates  
friends.
- 10 Rebuke is more effective for a wise *man*  
Than a hundred blows on a fool.
- An evil *man* seeks only rebellion;  
Therefore a cruel messenger will be sent  
against him.
- 12 Let a man meet a bear robbed of her  
cubs,  
Rather than a fool in his folly.
- 13 Whoever rewards evil for good,  
Evil will not depart from his house.
- 14 The beginning of strife *is like* releasing  
water;
- Therefore stop contention before a  
quarrel starts.
- 15 He who justifies the wicked, and he who  
condemns the just,  
Both of them alike *are* an abomination  
to the LORD.
- 16 Why *is there* in the hand of a fool the  
purchase price of wisdom,  
Since *he has* no heart for it?
- 17 A friend loves at all times,  
And a brother is born for adversity.
- 18 A man devoid of understanding shakes  
hands in a pledge,  
**And becomes surety for his friend.**
- 19 He who loves transgression loves strife,  
And he who exalts his gate seeks  
destruction.
- 20 He who has a deceitful heart finds no  
good,  
**And he who has a perverse tongue falls  
into evil.**
- 21 He who begets a scoffer *does so* to his  
sorrow,  
And the father of a fool has no joy.
- 22 A merry heart does good, *like*  
medicine,<sup>a</sup>  
But a broken spirit dries the bones.
- 23 A wicked *man* accepts a bribe behind  
the back<sup>a</sup>  
To pervert the ways of justice.
- 17:22 <sup>a</sup>Or makes medicine even better  
17:23 <sup>a</sup>Literally from the bosom

SOUL NOTE



**Children's Glory (17:6)** The Bible takes a high view of children and of parenting. The picture that "children's children are the crown of old men" makes many grandfathers nod in agreement. The statement that "the glory of children is their father" makes many fathers feel the weight of their responsibility. Children do indeed look up to their fathers with great respect, and wise fathers do well to take that respect seriously by how they raise their children, how they live, and how they love. Fathers are always having an effect for good and bad on their kids. **Topic: Fatherhood**

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