

“Faith of our Fathers”

Text - Psalm 128

Introduction: If you're a father, yours is an awesome, fearful assignment in our day, because you must lead your family through what I would call a minefield. As you look around, the landscape is littered with the wrecks of families: the wounded, the maimed, the destroyed. Families blown to bits by financial pressure, devastated and shattered by immorality, destroyed by drugs and alcohol. Our children live in an age where baby killing is called “freedom of choice,” sodomy is “sexual preference,” adultery “an affair.” You have to lead your children through this minefield. Dads, I know you want to put your children under your arms and get them safely through.

America will not be changed until her homes are changed. Homes will not be changed until dads are changed. The problem, very frankly, is failing fathers and drop-out dads.

Psalm 128 was written to dads. It's a father's psalm. It tells of the faith of our fathers. *What could be better than that?* Don't we all long for that! But a home like this doesn't come naturally—it doesn't just “sprout up,” unattended.

Let's “dig deeper” into this psalm and learn about the godly dad, the faithful father.

1. **The Character He Lives**
2. **The Companion He Loves**
3. **The Children He Leads**
4. **The Contribution He Leaves**

The Character He Lives

What about the character he lives out in his *daily life*? **“FEAR” GOD?**

Do you have a clear understanding of what the Bible means when it says “Fear the Lord”? The average person probably thinks it means to be frightened—quiver, whimper, cower in a corner out of fear. Or the sick feeling a student gets who's been misbehaving when he hears the principal's footsteps coming down the hallway. Fear.

But this is not what the Bible means by “fear the Lord.” Not cringing in fear when you think of God. *Fear of God* (used in the Bible) means *a reverence for God*. Someone has described the fear of God as “love on its knees.” The picture is coming clear. The fearing and the walking go together.

Someone once said, “Help me, Lord, not to fear what I'll miss if I do Your will; help me to fear what I'll miss if I don't.”

When an authority figure in your life has told you to do something, you should rightly fear if you have not done it. God is our ultimate Authority. He is King of Kings. When we properly “fear” Him—view Him in His majesty with awe and respect—we're going to obey Him! Fearing and walking go hand-in-hand. A person who fears God the most loves God the best.

A wife needs to see in her husband a fear of God. Children need to see, more than anything else in their dad, a fear (reverential awe and respect) of God.

A godly dad is hard-working. Your children need to see a dad who is industrious, a consistent and faithful worker, providing for his home. You, sir, are the Protector/Provider God placed in the home.

Your kids need you to fear God. They're facing **Humanism** that tells them man is the center of everything. **Materialism** tells them happiness belongs in things. **Hedonism** tells them to live wild and high. **Relativism** tells them there are no absolutes, no fixed standards of right and wrong. They need a God-fearing dad.

The Companion He Loves

“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house...” (v. 3)

A good wife is like a fruitful vine.

1. Like a vine, she faithfully clings to him.
2. Like a vine, she’s fruitful in all good works.
3. But she’s fragile. A vine needs the support that the house gives. This fruitful vine is leaning and depending upon you, dad.

Psalm 128 is not all that complicated. So far—

Verse 1—Fear God

Verse 2—Work industriously

Verse 3—Love your wife.

The best thing you can do for your kids is to fear God and to love their mother. You may be saying, “Well, I don’t know. My love is growing cold.” Friend, fire it up. You can *choose* to love your wife. It is not love that holds your marriage together; it’s marriage that holds your love together. You make a commitment: you say, “I will, by the grace of God.” God has commanded you to conduct yourself in a loving way toward your wife. If you do that long enough, your feelings will follow.

The Children He Leads

An olive plant needs to be cultivated and cared for until it becomes an olive *TREE*. In the Middle East, the olive tree, green and beautiful, is productive and valuable. And it is very, very stable. You can go today to the Garden of Gethsemane. They have olive trees there that some believe are 2,000 years old and may have been present when Jesus Christ prayed in the Garden. Those are mature olive trees. But God’s Word says that the children you lead are going to be like olive plants around your table. Like any fragile plant, they need to be cared for and nurtured.

But in America today we have phantom fathers, failing fathers, drop-out dads. The average American father in spends 7 ½ minutes a week with his teenage son or daughter, talking one-on-one.

Some of you spend very little time with your children. Friend, you’ve got to cultivate these olive plants.

This verse has both a **positive** and a **negative**:

Negative: Don’t provoke them to wrath. What does that mean? In the “Rogers Plain English” translation: “Don’t drive them nuts!”

“**PROVOKE**” - We use the word “provoke” all the time. When the Bible tells us to not “provoke” our children, what is it saying?

Not toexasperate / frustrate / badger / wound / humiliate

3 Ways to “Provoke” Your Child:

- a. **Under-discipline:** Giving in to every demand.
- b. **Inconsistency** in discipline: Making empty threats you don’t carry out.
- c. **Over-discipline:** A father who is a bully, a leader but not tender. This family will have problems. There must be balance. Here’s a formula to remember:

- **All rules + no relationship = rebellion**
- **All relationship + no rules = chaos.**

Positive: “Bring them up in the fear and admonition [nurture] of the Lord.”

“**NURTURE**” - Think of your child as a tender olive plant. Your local Garden Nursery and your home “nursery” have a lot in common. “Nurture” and “nursery” come from the same *root!*(pardon the pun).

What is involved in nurture/cultivation? Any gardener will tell you:

- time & patience & training
- good soil
- proper sun light (“Thy Word is a...light unto my path.”)
- proper amounts of water—don’t drown the plant OR withhold that needed water (“...by the washing of water by the Word”)
- Weeding. Removing bad influences from around the little plant—catching those weeds before they propagate throughout the soil.

There’s no way to do it without spelling love T-I-M-E. You say, “I just don’t have time.” Make the time. I have found we *make* time for what’s truly important to us. Dads, they’re like olive plants. They’ve got to be cultivated and cared for.

The Contribution He Leaves

Dad, the payoff for all your hard work is coming. A generation with God-fearing, hard-working fathers, men who love their wives, men who lead their children, will produce a strong nation. You'll see "the good of Jerusalem."

America will not be changed until her families are changed. Her families will not be changed until the fathers are changed. Part of the legacy a godly man leaves is a healthy nation.

Your Personal Legacy Notice the last verse of this psalm!

"Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel."

This is not just peace *in the nation*, but **your personal peace and legacy**.

The children's children are living in peace because of the legacy of a godly grandfather. "Thou shalt see thy children's children..."

There is nothing you can do about the home *you came from*. You can't do anything about your ancestors. But you *CAN* do something about your descendants!

Covenant with God and yourself today to become the man of Psalm 128 and 112.

The need of the hour is fathers who will be God-fearing, hard-working, who will love their wives and lead their children.

Here is a prayer of commitment:

"By the grace of God and in your power, I'm going to be a godly father, and I'm going to see my children's children, loving God, serving God, praising God."

One day they will think of you when they sing, "Faith of our Fathers, living still."

- 40% of today's children will go to sleep tonight without their biological fathers in the home. For the teenager, it is 50%.
- Only 1 in 5 of these will see their fathers weekly and in a typical year more than 35% will never see their fathers at all.
- 60% of all kids born in the 90's will grow up in single parent homes.
- Three thousand children everyday see their parents get divorced.
- 70% of black babies and 19% of white babies in the U.S. are born out of wedlock.
- According to the 2000 census, the number of families headed by single mothers grew at a rate five times that of families headed by a mother and father in the past decade.
- 70% of America's adolescent murderers, long-term prisoners, and teenage runaways come from fatherless homes.
- The Center for Disease Control found that nearly 1/3 of all boys who carry a lethal weapon to school come from fatherless homes.
- Those without a father are five times more likely to live in poverty, four times more likely to have behavioral problems that require psychiatric treatment, twice as likely to drop out of school and twice as likely to go to jail.
- A study of 39 teenage girls who were suffering from anorexia showed that 36 of them lacked a close relationship with their father.
- A Johns Hopkins University study found that young white teenage girls living in fatherless homes were 60% more likely to have premarital sex than those living in two-parent homes.
- Most of the world's renowned atheists come from fatherless homes.
- If both father and mother go to church, 72% of the children will also go to church when they grow up. If only the father goes to church, the percentage drops to 55%. However, if only the mother goes to church, only 15% of those children will go to church when they are grown.

No doubt, you have heard the true story about the busy congressman who spent the day fishing with his son. Later that day he wrote in his diary, "Today I went fishing with my son. A day wasted." The congressman's son also kept a diary; his notation read, "Went fishing with my father today...the greatest day of my life."

Paul Harvey said that "fathers are what give daughters away to other men who aren't nearly good enough, so they can have grandchildren who are smarter than anybody's."

One little boy was asked to define Father's Day. He said, "It's just like Mother's Day only you don't spend as much."

According to *Focus on the Family*, "more than 20 million American children grow up without a dad," and "the United States leads the world in fatherless families." According to another source...A few years ago, Louis Sullivan, the secretary of Health and Family Services, made this perceptive statement, "Male absence from family life is the greatest challenge of our generation." You have probably seen the statistics.

Fatherless daughters are 53% more likely to marry as teenagers, 111% more likely to have children as teenagers, 164% more likely to have an out-of-wedlock birth, and they have a 92% higher divorce rate than girls that are raised with a dad at home. Fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of high school and are 50% more likely to have learning disabilities. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, fatherless children are 200% more likely to have emotional problems, and twice as likely to need psychological help. 80% of adolescents admitted for psychiatric reasons come from fatherless families.

The Heritage Foundation study found that growing up without a father is now the single most reliable predictor of crime. 70% of all juveniles and long-term inmates, 60% of rapists, and 72% of adolescent murders come from fatherless homes. From relationships to crime, one factor looms as the most significant contributor - A HOME WITHOUT A DAD!