

Spiritual Leadership in the Home: The Father as Leader of His Children

After visiting America, the Duke of Windsor was asked what most impressed him about America. He replied, “The way American parents obey their children.” The regrettable reality is that he was right! In many homes, it is the little ones who are doing the leading. As the title of one book on parenting asks, *Who’s in Charge Here?* Rather than being taught that they are part of the family circle with Christ in the center, children are being treated as if (and thereby being taught that) **they** are the center of the circle. “A child-centered home is one in which a child believes and is allowed to behave as though the entire household, parents, siblings, and even pets exist for one purpose—to please him” (Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger*, p. 24). Another all-too-familiar phenomenon is the family that is led by a lady. While this is becoming more common due to the increase in the number of single-parent homes, it is also becoming all too common in homes with a husband. To quote James 3:10:

My brethren, these things ought not so to be!

The head of the home is to be the husband. When the Fall took place, God first got on Adam’s case (Genesis 3:9). In giving children and parents their reciprocal responsibilities in Ephesians 6:1-4//Colossians 3:20-21, Paul places the parental duties upon dads (Ephesians 6:4//Colossians 3:21). Whereas the previous study in this series focused on the spiritual leadership of the husband in relation to his wife, this study focuses on the spiritual leadership of the father in relation to his children.

To help dads discharge their duty to lead their little ones, here are some directives:

- **Be a father with some fortitude.**

“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15; see also the similar words of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:21). Guys, we need to pick up the gauntlet that Joshua just threw down at our feet, determined to go against the grain of our 13 culture in leading our little ones to live for the Lord. “A true Christian must be no slave to fashion, if he would train his child for heaven. He must not be content to do things merely because they are the custom of the world; to teach them and instruct them in certain ways, merely because it is usual; to allow them to read books of a questionable sort, merely because everybody else reads them; to let them form habits of a doubtful tendency, merely because they are the habits of the day. He must train with an eye to his children’s souls. He must not be ashamed to hear his training called singular and strange. What if it is? The time is short, —the fashion of this world passeth away. He that has trained his children for heaven, rather than for earth, —for God, rather than for man, —he is the parent that will be called wise at last” (J. C. Ryle, *The Duties of Parents*, p. 9).

- **Formulate a philosophy.**

Dedicated and determined to be the spiritual leader of your children that God has called you to be, it is vital that you envision the destination to which you are going to direct them. For Abraham, that destination was simply to “keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment” (Genesis 18:19). It is highly advisable that every dad develop a parenting plan. Start with a mission statement (“My family exists to ...”). Generate goals that go with it. Spell out specific strategies to go with the goals. Then, put the plan into practice (having planned the work, work the plan). Such a plan will serve as your map as you navigate the parenting path.

Here is one such plan:

Mission statement: My family exists to spread God's fame for the sake of His name by making and maturing disciples through the ministry of His Word through our local church **Goals** (with *strategies*)

☐ *Salvation* (prayer, presentation of gospel, training to obey)

☐ *Sanctification* (prayer, example, local church)

☐ *Service* (prayer, example, involvement, exposure to Christian servants)

☐ *Separation* (parentally-controlled exposure to corrupting influences)

☐ "Sold out" (example, exposure to those who are)

- **Lead "your" children to their Lord.**

Everything belongs to God (Deuteronomy 10:14 and Psalm 24:1-2), including the children whom God has given you (Genesis 33:5, 48:9, Psalm 127:3, Isaiah 14 8:18). They were created by Him and for Him (Isaiah 43:7, Ezekiel 16:20-21, Colossians 1:16), not by you and for you. Parenting is a stewardship, for which fathers will ultimately be held accountable.

- **Restrain**

Fathers must recognize the reality that their children are born in sin (Psalm 51:5 and 58:3) and bound by it (Proverbs 22:15a; the Hebrew verb translated "bound" in this verse is the same verb used in Joshua 2:18 and 21 to describe the tying of the cord of scarlet thread in Rahab's window) and rise up to their responsibility to resist their children's rebellion and seek to release them from it by means of the rod and reproof (Proverbs 29:15), spanking (Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 23:13-14) and speaking (what Eli failed to do, 1 Samuel 3:11-13; what David failed to do, 1 Kings 1:6).

Fathers must also guard their children's hearts (Proverbs 4:23) against the insidious influences of the life-without-God-at-the-center-is-normal culture in which we live.

- **Train**

Dads, we have not done our duty if we simply resist the wrong in our children; we must replace the wrong with right, vice with virtue (Romans 12:21, Ephesians 4:22-24). We are to bring up our children not only in the discipline but also in the instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). So, take positive, proactive steps to train your children in the things of the Lord, such as: o Bring (not send) your children to church "Do not allow them to grow up with a habit of making vain excuses for not coming. Give them plainly to understand, that so long as they are under your roof it is the rule of your house for every one in health to honour the Lord's house upon the Lord's day, and that you reckon the Sabbath-breaker to be a murderer of his own soul" (J. C. Ryle, *The Duties of Parents*, p. 15). o Lead in family devotions o Lead your children in establishing personal devotions "... [W]herever it is, you need your own quiet place where you can be all alone with God. Our family has been convinced of this for a long time. In fact, in our previous home in California, we built it into the décor of our home. Each one of our children had a desk, not a big, massive, attractive 15 thing, but a place to write, equipped with a chair and a light. That was one of the first pieces of furniture we provided for each of their rooms. We provided it even before they knew why they were getting a desk. And we helped them know what to do when they were at the desk with the Lord. It was their rendezvous spot with God. We deliberately planted that into their thinking" (Charles Swindoll, *Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication*, p. 243).

Here's a suggested personal Bible reading plan for children:

Year Age of Child* Plan

- 1** Kindergarten - 1st grade one-year Bible story book
- 2** 1st grade – 2nd grade Psalms and Proverbs (2 times each)
- 3** 2nd grade – 3rd grade New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs
- 4** 3rd grade – 4th grade NT, Psalms, and Proverbs (notes on New Testament)

5 4th grade – 5th grade entire Bible

- 6** 5th grade – 6th grade entire Bible (notes on Old Testament)

7+ 6th grade – 7th grade+ Child's choice (with parental approval) *Since year is a calendar year (January-December), age involves parts of two successive school grades.

o Involve them in ministry with you

o Talk the talk and walk the walk

o Seek to be the one who leads your children to the Lord

• Spend time with them.

If leadership is influence (and it is at least that), one cannot influence without involvement. According to one study, the average father spends 37 seconds a day with his child. If we spend less than a minute a day with our children, our influence upon them will be minimal and minute. The time spent training our children to be spiritual leaders is one of the best investments we could ever make, for doing so will increase our influence exponentially.