

This Week at the Creek

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Here's the text from the pastor's Sunday message:

God of Our Fathers

Ephesians 6:4

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During some hard economic times, an elderly couple were shopping at a grocery store when the husband decided to steal a can of peaches. The inevitable happened, and he was caught. Upon his court date, the judge asked him what he had stolen. "Your Honor, I stole a can of peaches," he answered. The judge then asked, "And how many peaches were in the can?" "Six," he said. "Well then," the judge responded, "I'm going to sentence you to six days in jail." At this point his wife stood up behind him and said, "Your Honor, he also stole a can of peas."

The Bible teaches time and again that the long road to becoming a good dad begins with discipline – first of all of yourself and then of your children. And when it comes to the discipline of your children, this passage says that the purpose of a father's discipline is to help his children grow – not to exasperate them or provoke them to anger or discouragement. In other words, it takes patience to raise children in a loving manner. Frustration and anger should never be causes for discipline. Dads should act in love, treating their children as Jesus treats the people He loves. This is vital to their development and to their understanding of what Christ is like.

So don't exasperate your kids. And especially don't exasperate them with an offensive and belligerent brand of Christianity – which isn't Christianity at all. Let me ask you: Are you pursuing your faith in a way that it becomes an offense to your children? I ask this because I have seen more than one dad try to force his children into acting like Christians all the more so when the church or the public is watching. It's so unfortunate that too many people, including Christians, have a public persona and a private persona. They appear as warm, congenial, righteous people in public – but they're demons at home. We're our worst selves with the people closest to us! As Christians, we should have only one persona – or we're no longer living in truth. We should strive to live tirelessly the humility,

tolerant love, and mutual submission of the Gospel both in private and in public. Why? Because the most important witness we have is at stake: the witness within our families.

So let me make myself clear: We – dads and everybody else – should never act like something we're not. We'd best concentrate on being rather than acting. Be a Christian; don't just act like one. It's putting on an act that earns us the label "hypocrite," and appropriately so. Fathers, don't teach your children to act like Christians; teach them to be Christians. Don't exasperate them by coming down hard on them. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.

Custom at Duquesne University dictated that if a professor was ten minutes late, class was canceled. One professor arrived early for a nine o'clock lecture, placed his hat on his desk, and went to the faculty room. Before he knew it, it was ten after. By the time he got back to his classroom, it was empty. The next day, he let his students have it: "When my hat is here, I am here!" The following day, arriving precisely at nine, the professor was met by the sight of 28 hats on 28 desks – but no students. Your children are more apt to do as you do and less apt to do as you say!

Now to help us understand the role of fathers – what we're supposed to be and do and what we're not supposed to be and do – I want to tell you about a couple of fathers. Both are biblical dads; both are described as righteous men. But one of them proved to be a good example while the other a bad example of fatherhood.

For the good example we turn to Noah. Noah was told by God to build an ark big enough to save himself and his family and two of every kind of animal. It's interesting to me that we decorate our children's rooms and even the church nursery with Noah's ark and the animals – always an emphasis on the animals. But we need to remember that God assigned Noah this project to save his household – first and foremost to save his family. The animals were in some respects merely hitchhikers on the ark. So what does Noah's story say about the kind of dad he was?

First, Noah lived his life in a way that his **children** would actually get into the **boat** with him. Keep in mind that not a drop of rain had fallen when his sons joined him in the project of building the ark. Were they stupid? Did they think their dad was crazy? No, because Noah lived his life in a way that his kids knew who he was. They knew his faith in God and therefore, they believed their dad.

Second, Noah built his household in the same way he built the ark: He made sure his family would **float** through the **struggles** of life. He knew perfectly well that a deathly difficult time lay ahead. And rather than just hope that his kids would be able to weather the coming storm, he prepared them and he taught them and he showed them and he demonstrated for them how to get through.

And third, Noah was a man respected **most** by those who knew him **best**. There were those throughout his society who thought he was completely nuts: *What kind of paranoid maniac would work on a massive boat when there's no sea for hundreds of miles and no record of there ever being a flood?* But they weren't the ones who knew him best. Noah's family knew him best; they knew that he had lived out what he'd believed. And because they saw him live it, they both loved and respected him.

Now let's turn to the bad example: Lot. Think of him standing with his Uncle Abraham looking over an expanse of land. His uncle had granted him the choice of which land to take, so he decided on the rich valley lands and left Abraham to deal with the more rugged terrain. Lacking vision and failing to seek God's guidance, Lot gathered up his family and settled them down in the bustling city of Sodom – yes, the Sodom of "Sodom and Gomorrah" fame. It's apparent that Lot loved the Sodom scene; in spite of all its evil, he stayed put and got involved in the social and cultural life. But when Lot later hosted angelic visitors, the men of Sodom surrounded his house demanding that he send out his visitors so that they could have sex with them. Trying to pacify them, Lot offered them his two virgin daughters instead, saying, "Do with them as you wish, but leave these men alone, for they are under my protection." O come on, Lot! And your daughters aren't under your protection? So what then does Lot's story say about the kind of dad he was?

First, Lot was so concerned with **fitting** in with the society and culture of Sodom that he wasn't concerned about his family's **response** to God's will for their lives. He went so far as to offer his own daughters not only to protect his angelic visitors but also to perpetuate the abominably sinful lifestyle of the city. Lot swallowed the cultural values while disregarding his moral responsibility. So through the process of fitting in too well with the sick world in which he lived, he lost his family to the influence of Sodom. His wife couldn't even refrain from looking back toward Sodom! His daughters' fiancés couldn't be convinced to leave. And even Lot hesitated to leave his beloved – but atrociously wicked – city.

Second, Lot made a brilliant **career** move but without thinking about its **effect** on his family. The region of land he chose was in close proximity to other commercial cities, had a wonderful valley for shepherding flocks, was near a good marketplace to buy and sell, and possessed good roadways for commerce. But Lot's chosen town of Sodom was also a ticking time bomb. Home of horrendous sexual immorality, the city actually had an even deeper problem – an attitude problem. The people of Sodom were terribly arrogant, and their arrogance was both cultural and intergenerational. About the only thing Sodom would not tolerate was intolerance of their immoral and decadent lifestyle. Sound like anyplace else you know about?

And third, Lot was willing to **sacrifice** his family – his daughters – in order to **maintain** his social status and political position. Unfortunately, Lot may

have even thought that he was ministering to his angelic visitors when he offered the wicked Sodomites his daughters in their stead. On the other hand, he may have been trying to keep the support of the citizenry without offending his visitors. In either case, his priorities were misconstrued, and he not only compromised with and perpetuated the evil in his city but also prolonged and hastened it along as well. And in the end, he lost the respect of his wicked society – as well as that of his family.

Dads, wherever you are in your faith and family journey, it's not too late to make some changes for the better. There's a Spanish story of a father and son who had become estranged. The son ran away, and the father set off to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate attempt to find him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper: "Dear Paco, Meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father." On Saturday at noon, 800 young men – all named Paco – were standing in front of the newspaper office, yearning for forgiveness and love from their fathers.

So, go home, dads! Strive to see to it that your children have a father looking out for their welfare, a father who is **walking in the light** of God's Word, a father who is turning his home into an ark that will weather the storms of life, a father whose children will follow his faith rather than tolerate his eccentricities. There are a lot of Lots out there; but there are still a few Noahs. Which will your children have?

Let us pray: We pray, Lord, for the dads represented here today, that they will refuse to settle for average when, with Your help, they can become great fathers. Help us refuse to settle for giving our family the bare, minimum requirements when we can affect the heart and soul of our home. Indeed, bless each of our homes today with the full fruit of Your Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In the name of Your Son we pray.

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