



# Fathering by the Book

A Training Hearts for Jesus Article

By Mario Cannavo

**H**ave you noticed how many books there are out there on the subject of Fatherhood? Of all the thousands of books that are written each year including those from a Christian perspective or those that offer psychological self-help and even the one entitled “Being a Great Dad for Dummies” (yes, it’s out there!) there is really only one book that should be your first go to and that’s God’s Book - The Bible. We are told in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

I think we can all agree there is nothing easy about being a father. Especially in the world we live in today. The institution of fatherhood is under attack from many directions. A glaring example is one I read about recently that occurred last year when the New Jersey Department of Education mandated that students can change their genders – “and parents will not be notified”— clearly making the claim that parents being left in the dark is a matter of safety, as in protection *from* their parents, thereby preempting a primary role of fathers as protectors of their children. Basically the mandate is permitting impressionable young children to believe, not only that they can choose whatever gender they feel at the moment, but also that their enemies are their parents! Implying that the parents cannot be confided in or consulted on such matters but that such decisions should be left to strangers outside the family (or as they refer to themselves as the “professionals”).

So, where do we begin to fight this seemingly insurmountable war against fatherhood and the family? First we need to examine our relationship with our spouse. It is our first line of defense against the forces that seek to destroy the family. What is going on in your marriage? After all, God tells us that our marriage is the priority relationship.

## 1. The Marriage Relationship by The Book

God has ordained that when a man leaves his father and his mother and becomes joined to his wife, the two become one flesh. Ephesians 5:30-32 tells us that because we are members of his body that

*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

Marriage, therefore is the covenant relationship between a man and a woman before God.

Jesus, in Matthew 19:6 quotes the Genesis 2 account of marriage and further endorses the union of man and woman by saying,

*“what therefore God has joined together, let no one separate”.*

Once joined together then God has made it clear in 1 Corinthians 11:3 that the husband is the head of the relationship.

*But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*

Here is where we encounter the first serious issue in the joining of man and woman. The greatest problems facing many families today is the lack of leadership by the husband. Some husbands don't understand that God has ordained them for this role, while others simply don't know the first thing about how they should biblically lead; still others simply refuse to fulfill the role of leader. That is why Christian marriage counselors and pastors alike see this problem over and over again. The great majority of men in counseling do not realize that many of the serious issues that are plaguing their homes is a direct result of their inability or unwillingness to assume the role of leadership. It is clear that the lack of the husband's leadership in his home will definitely create a chain of marital discontent, financial burdens, and parenting issues. Let's take a closer look at some of the reasons behind why husbands fail to lead, and how they can begin to Biblically lead their wife and family.

- A man may not have had a good male leadership model in his home as he grew up.
- A husband may be misdirected and content to abandon the leadership role in the home, creating a need for the woman to have to pick up the burden, while he finds contentment in his work and/or hobbies.
- When a wife is biblically ignorant of her role in the family, and usurps her husband's authority as the leader, this husband may simply give up and give in, rather than do the battle over the role of leadership. Or prior to understanding the biblical roles, a husband might believe that his wife is more proficient in leading the home and doubts his value to the family, so he surrenders the job over to his wife.
- A husband may allow himself to be manipulated by his wife through emotions, denial of intimacy, or possibly even verbal discouragement leading to the surrender of his leadership.
- When a church fears man above God and fears the culture's backlash over male-female inequality, a husband may remain ignorant regarding his role due to the insufficiency of biblical truth being taught about the family roles.

These are just a few of the reasons that either inhibit a man from taking the responsibility God has ordained for him or discourage him from owning his role. But men it is important to understand that none of these are valid excuses, and when held up to the word of God they will not pass muster. The marriage must be set right by the truth of God's word. The husband must faithfully overcome the difficulties and roadblocks, and accept his God ordained position in the home.

## 2. The Antidote by The Book

When our marriage honors God then we become the father that better reflects the character of God. Paul gives us insight into how we can become the husband that God commands us to be.

Ephesians 5:28-29 tells us exactly what we are to do:

*In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church.*

So, practically speaking what would that look like? If I'm not loving my wife as if she were a member of my own body I have failed to love her as Christ loves the church, which is his body.

It is clear that husbands are called by God to do every good thing they can to assist their wives to become godly Christian women - women who are like Christ. Just as we as husbands are to be in the word daily we are also to be engaged in washing our bride in the word. Our concern should be her spiritual health, growth and sanctification. As husbands we are called to sacrificially love our wife and share Christ's desire for her holiness. Men we should constantly be aiming our love toward our spouse's godliness.

Here are some practical ways we can model and exhibit this love:

- Having a time of devotions with her daily or at the least as many times a week as possible.
- Attending a Bible teaching church.
- Serving together in ministry.
- Setting the tone of the home and family based on the love of Christ accomplished by praying with her and for her.
- Date your wife on a regular basis. Keep your relationship fresh, exciting and intimate.

Peter also gives instruction to husbands regarding prayer and their relationship with their wives as well in 1 Peter 3:7

*You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."*

Christian husbands can often hit the target in many areas of showing love but then drop the proverbial ball at this point, failing to fulfill their husbandly duty and call from the Lord.

Men, if you follow these simple instructions in God's word then you are on your way to becoming the man of God, husband and father you are called to be. We are commanded by Jesus in Matthew 22:37 to

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*

Fathers, to love God with heart, soul and mind we must commit ourselves to God daily, even moment by moment, offering to Him everything: our lives, our spouses and our children.

### 3. Relationships with our Children by The Book

Next, turning to our relationship with our children we can look to the following instructions contained in the scriptures:

It is a Fathers responsibility to raise up his children to know the living God through our example of how we love them and discipline and train them up. Ephesians 6:4 warns us,

*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

Compiling a comprehensive laundry list of everything children get exasperated over would take more years than I have left. However, the Bible does provide several key areas to contemplate. This particular verse is referring to fathers of young children who still need to be trained up. A father who parents from an authoritarian bent will definitely cause exasperation at any age, so one must consider if they fall in this authoritarian camp. This demonstrates an unbiblical, disdainful attitude and a lack of respect for the child. Authoritarian parenting is equivalent to the bullying of the smaller person. This is even more destructive with the teen.

Ignoring the season of maturity and responsible independence strips the teen from any relationship with dad or any dignity for self.

Remember the audience to whom Paul was writing. History tells us that Greece was a patriarchal society and authoritarian fathers were treated like kingly rulers of their homes and brandished unquestionable authority and a heavy handed approach to parenting. Paul's teaching here is counter to this principle and instead calls us to model Christ in our homes through servant leadership in the same vein as Christ.

Fathers are not to act like dictators in their homes as this will surely produce angry rebellious children who resent this type of treatment. Although the outward behavior of children may be modified they will become like little Pharisees as their hearts are hardened and remain in sin and rebellion even as their outward appearance may tell a different story. Rather, fathers are to be a model of our Lord by:

- Nurturing and by loving their children.
- By being biblically minded and disciplining in love with a focus on self control.
- By giving their children the ability to be disciplined, resulting in the ability to say no to themselves and yes to God.

Fathers accomplish this by pouring God's word into them on a daily basis to help them develop godly character and by dealing with the issues of their hearts with biblical discipline to restore them to right relationship with their Heavenly Father and earthly parents.

Fathers are called to pray for their children. Stop and examine David's Prayer of Blessing in 1 Chronicles 29:18-20

*O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, keep this desire forever in the intentions of the hearts of Your people, and direct their hearts toward You. And give my son Solomon a whole heart to keep and carry out all Your commandments, decrees, and statutes, and to build Your palace for which I have made provision." Then David said to the whole assembly, "Blessed be the LORD your God."*

Fathers should make a daily habit of praying for and with their children. When a Dad engages his children in prayer it is a tender and loving snapshot of Jesus praying and submitting to His Father and understanding the love the Father has for the Son. Though you might be tired from the day, Dads have an incredible opportunity before bedtime to have some quality time with the kids. Encourage them to sit with you and read some scripture or a Christ-

centered book and let them talk about their day. Build relationship with your children. This will serve you so well even into the teen years. You will never regret making this commitment.

During this time together, tell them that God is their heavenly Father and they are His children and that He wants a relationship with them and invites them to call Him Father. Tell your children that God desires for them to come to Him, just as they came to you and spent time with you on the couch. Explain to them that they can talk to God anytime about their lives and their problems just as they can talk to you and their mom. Then lead them in prayer and if they are willing to join in have them take turns praying and talking to God. Include Mom as well, and close together with a short prayer for each child including specific prayer for their future and for the family. Follow this with a time of hugs and kisses.

Fathers are called to love and nurture their children beyond the youthful mistakes they make and the sins they commit. We find an example of this agape love in the parable of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15:18

*I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate."*

This doesn't mean that your children will not have consequences for their sins. It is a dad's Christian duty to train up and correct his children. I know that my children did not enjoy being disciplined and yet it promoted a deep sense of security for them knowing Dad and Mom love them enough to correct their self-willed and rebellious behavior. Good Biblical parenting is the primary act of stewardship over our children, given to us by God that reflects the fatherhood of our Lord as we lovingly, calmly and most importantly without anger, administer the short-term sting of discipline in order to help shape their long-term character. This is the long view we should take in our parenting. As the word of God says in Hebrews 12:6, 11:

*For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and chastises every son whom he receives.*



*For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

Fathers are called to impart wisdom and a knowledge of God's word to their children and lay the foundation for a Godly legacy. In 1 Kings 2:1-4 David is instructing Solomon as he was nearing his final days, commanding Solomon his son, saying, in verses 2-4

*I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn, that the LORD may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, "If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul..."*

Next we see that King Solomon indeed has been granted wisdom beyond all others by the Lord. In Proverbs 1:1-7 he shares some of that wisdom:

*The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth. Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Here are some practical ways to impart wisdom and knowledge:

- Spend time reading Bible stories about characters from both the old and New Testament. Lead them to dig deeper by going beyond the story and asking them questions like, "What did you admire about the people in this story? How did they show their faith in God?" Don't just share their good deeds, but also talk about their struggles and sins. Ask your kids "What were some of the ungodly traits of the people in the story? What should they have done differently? How did they, or how could they have honored God?"
- Teach them how to set short term and long term goals that honor God and how to reach them. Set them up for success by training them to plan the steps they will need to reach their goals. This can be taught to children of any age from toddlers to teens.



- Train them to memorize and meditate on the Word. There is nothing better for imparting wisdom and knowledge and more worthy of praise than the Bible given to us by our Lord so that we could know Him and His love.
- Let your home and even your car be filled with sounds of Christian praise music. This doesn't mean that you and your children can never listen to anything else but please listen with discernment in advance of sharing any kind of media. Music can also be a powerful tool for memorization of the Word as well, especially for the little ones.
- Teach your children to recognize real truth, as opposed to imagined truth and worldly truth. Just as bank tellers are trained to recognize counterfeit bills by handling and knowing the touch and appearance of real dollar bills, we can do the same by studying, knowing and experiencing the real truth of God's word verses the sinful counterfeit truth of the world. Proverbs 22:6 tells us:

*Train up a child in the way he should go even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

We are also commanded in Deuteronomy 6: 6

*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

#### 4. Accountability by The Book

Fathers need to have accountability with brothers in the Lord. Men we need to fellowship with like minded, grounded Christian Dads in our daily battles. Men can also look to the older more seasoned Christian men for counsel. The phrase "iron sharpens iron" is found in Proverbs 27:17:

*As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.*

This scripture is an illustration about the mutual benefit in the friction created by the rubbing of two iron blades together thereby making the cutting edges sharper and more efficient in their task, likewise, the Word of God is a "double-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12), and it is with this that we are to sharpen one another by meeting and having times of fellowship with other dads.

Indeed men as you can see it's not easy being a father today, but it is a privilege. Be encouraged as you are not alone in the task as the Lord will be your guide. Let me leave you with these two exhortations from Jeremiah 46:3-4 and Ephesians 6:10-12

*Prepare buckler and shield and advance for battle! 4 Harness the horses; mount, O horsemen. Take your stations with your helmets, polish your spears; put on your armor!*

And lastly,

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **11**Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **12**For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

Men, may the Lord grant you patience, wisdom and perseverance as you steward your spouse and your children by the Book!

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