

THE EXAMINER



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The Biblical Concept of Father ---- by Boyd Sellers

A recent Reader's Digest article, "Life Without Father" (February 1997), shows a picture of a lonely-looking little girl sitting on one end of a couch. At the other end is an outline of a male figure to emphasize his absence. The caption beneath the picture reads, "What a man contributes to child rearing may surprise you." In the article, David Popenoe, professor of sociology at Rutgers University, mentions some of the "surprises" that emerge when a child loses a father, especially in the "modern, voluntary way." He mentions some of the usual results, including out of wedlock births and teen suicide. Then, though he does not mention God or the Bible in the article, his conclusions would tell you that in order to restore soundness and stability to our homes, we need the kind of fathers God describes. That's interesting because God's word is the answer to problems of family and fatherhood and, it is a fact that the Bible picture of the ideal human father is a beautiful, complete, manly picture.

What thoughts does the word "father" bring to your mind? It is so natural and forceful to think of your own father that we sons even tend to

"become our fathers" unless we have contrary concepts set before us! We want, at this time, to look at "father" from God's perspective. We will concentrate on what the dictionary calls the "immediate male ancestor" and we will see him as "nourisher," "protector," and "upholder." One thing that you have to notice in this biblical picture is that "father" is not a passive role. He is right in the middle of what is going on in his family.

Human Fathers

The Holy Spirit instructs, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (**Eph. 6:4**). The biblical picture of "father" is of one who "nourishes" his children. He "brings them up, nurtures, rears" them. He doesn't wait until something goes wrong to act. He commands, "My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart" (**Prov. 3:1; cf. 6:20**). He is not a cruel dictator as the complete picture reveals, but he is leading his home as head. He instructs, "Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my

teaching" (**Prov. 4:1-2; cf. 1:8**). He guides, encourages, and warns "My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them" (**Prov. 1:10**). ". . . do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths" (**Prov. 1:15; cf. 19:27**). In his training, he is moving his children to think beyond today. "My son, . . . Keep sound wisdom and discretion, . . . they will be life to your soul..." (**see Prov. 3:21-26**). A main part of the picture is the direction that his "nourishing takes." In all he does by word and example, he wants that child of his to be all he can be for the Lord! That is his prayer! I have always appreciated David's words to Solomon as he tried to prepare him to be the kind of king God wanted him to be. "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind." He doesn't just want him to know about God. He wants his children to be close to God! (**1 Chron. 28:9**). Whatever else his children accomplish, that has to come first.

You might think right now that you want your children to grow up to be super athletes, great lawyers, drive big cars, live in big houses, wear expensive clothes. I can tell you from the experience of one who can see backward now, that none of those things is going to be top priority with you then. I know "children" who have grown up and gained every earthly advantage, but they left the Lord. Their parents are devastated, watching helplessly as their grandchildren grow up either in some

false religion or in such secularism that it makes their hearts ache. It matters little then that your children have everything "in this world" in a material sense if you know that they do not have the Lord! But, if they grow up and have the Lord, and your grandchildren are being taught to know the Lord, whatever else they don't have will be of little consequence! He "nourishes" his children "in the Lord"!

The Bible picture of father is also of one who "protects" his children. He may not have to protect them from "lions and tigers," but there are dangers just as real. He knows from experience some of the things his inexperienced children are going to have to face and he works to prepare them. He talks to his sons about the adulterous woman. "Drink water from your own cistern" (**Prov. 5:6**). He in-forms his children about what God has to say about sex, strong drink, money, property rights, faithful wives and faithful husbands, people who won't work, accepting responsibility, kindness, trust, and honesty. He lets his children know how they appear to others and how their lives affect other people. Young people don't always like the judgments of their elders, but people "sum us up" by the way we act and, "Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right" (**Prov. 20:11**). He tells his kids that they don't know everything, and, further, if they don't listen to the voice of wisdom (i.e., dad and mom) they are going to fall

flat on their faces! "Listen, my son, keep your heart on the right path" (**Prov. 23:19**). There is pleading in his voice. He knows what his children are doing and they don't get by with anything! While he is sensitive to their needs, he knows "folly is bound up in the heart of a child" (**Prov. 22:15**), so he rebukes, restrains, punishes, and chastens. It is important to notice that he uses the rod (or switch) when it is needed. And, he says all the things we say, like, "This hurts me more than it does you" and "I'm doing this because I love you." He knows, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him" (**Prov. 13:24**). The Bible picture of a father is that of a man that, whatever the cost, is not going to let his children grow up without discipline and direction in their lives. He lets them know that he will not be the one responsible for their "destruction" (**Prov. 19:18**). And further, it would be absolutely unbelievable that this man would ever desert his children! (**Ps. 27:10**). He is their protector!

The biblical father is also his children's "upholder." He brags on his children and lets them know that they are a delight to him when they do what is right. I can hear him telling them, "A wise son brings joy to his father....; "...If your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad; my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right" (**Prov. 15:20; 23:15-16**). The opposite is hard for him to take too. It breaks his

heart when his children do dumb things. "There is no joy for the father of a fool," "... a companion of gluttons disgraces his father" (**Prov. 17:21; 28:7**). Like the prodigal son's father (**Luke 15**), he is always ready to for-give when his children's hearts are broken over sin. One thing his children know is that whether he is rejoicing with them or playing with them, or chastening them, he has their ultimate welfare in mind. He is working, not to "provoke them to anger but to "bring them up in the nurture and chastening of the Lord" (**Eph. 6:4**). He is giving them himself.

God, as Father

It should be of interest to note that this biblical concept of "fatherhood" helps us be aware of what God is like, and a good father provides a definite advantage in helping his children understand God.

It is a fact that the very best example of a father is seen in the relationship God has with his people. He is the ideal Father! While the idea is occasionally found in the Old Testament, God as a "Father" is best seen in the New Testament. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven..." (**Matt. 6:9**) and he often spoke to his disciples of having that kind of relationship with God.

The wonder of it all is expressed by John. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are..." (**1 John 3:1**).

God as our Father gives us every advantage! He is infinitely wise; he is our rock and protector through every storm. He rejoices when we overcome sin grieves when we fall. He provides us with everything we have (even the air we breathe). He chastens and disciplines (**Heb. 12:6**). And, behind all of the attention he shows us as our Father is the greatest demonstration of love that could ever be shown. He was willing to give his own Son to save us from hell! That's the kind of Father he is! Someone has suggested that for a quick dose of "humility," just ask yourself if you are the kind of father God is!

Conclusion

Over 25 years ago, singer Barry Manilow sang a song called "Ships." It was a song about a father and his son, and the son describes their relationship. Here is one of the sad verses:

"We're two ships that pass in the night,
We both smile and we say it's all
right;
We're still here it's just that we're out of sight
Like those ships that pass in
the night."

It is easy for that to happen to get squeezed into a "system" like that. Instead of challenging fathers to give of themselves, it encourages us to give kids the stuff our in-creased salaries can buy: a better education membership at the club material possessions nicer homes extra cars personal TVs credit cards computers, etc. We need to determine that we are not going to take our cues from such a system! We need (as fathers) to re-member that the greatest earthly gifts we can provide our children are our presence and influence while we live, and a great memory of "father" once we are gone. Fathers, let's take our cue from the Lord.

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HAPPY FATHER'S DAY TO ALL - MAY GOD'S GLORY BE SEEN IN ALL