

THE CHRISTIAN HOME

by

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CHAPTER SIX

THE CHRISTIAN FATHER

Ephesians 6:4

FATHER! What a great word and with what a great meaning! To every serious man who is a father there comes the question, "How can I be the best father?"

Dr. Payson gives fathers an exhortation that seems to carry the challenge of Christ to every man occupying this high and exalted position.

What if God should place in your hand a diamond, and tell you to inscribe on it a sentence which should be read at the last day, and shown there as an index of your own thoughts and feelings? What care, what caution would you exercise in the selection! Now, this is what God has done. He has placed before you the immortal minds of your children, more imperishable than the diamond; on which you are about to inscribe every day and every hour, by your instructions, by your spirit, or by your example, something which will remain, and be exhibited for or against you at the judgment day.

Some time ago Dr. John Holland, radio pastor, in an address at a father-son banquet, presented three words as forming the pattern of his message. His three words of counsel to fathers about their sons were, "Play with him, stay with him and pray with him."

THE FATHER SHOULD PLAY WITH HIS CHILDREN

Mr. Average Father has, for the most part, lost contact with the play-life of his children. F. A. Crosby says that it is the duty and privilege of a father to read with his boy, play with him, make things with him, talk baseball and football with him; to roam the woods and fields with him, as opportunity offers; to hunt, fish, and swim with him. Sharing such joys as these with his boy means the sharing of parent life and establishing a bond of attachment that will never break. Just the thought of these things will turn any home into a boys' "club."

The importance of play is not well enough realized by parents. Parents often look upon play as foolishness or as a waste of time. Nothing could be further from the truth. Play is vital to the child and is closely related to his total physical, spiritual, and mental development. Children are mostly all muscle, and this fact explains their desire for play. Nearly their whole life is built around their muscles; thus there must be action in their program.

Nothing—neither love, room, good intentions, time, interest nor adaptability—can take the place of action in a child’s life. Action is the growing edge of their lives. Thus the vital importance for the father to make such a connection with the play or action life of his children as will make him a definite part of it.

Dr. G. E. Johnson in his book, *Education Through Play and Games*, points out that it takes a human being almost one-third of his life to get ready to live, and that that one-third is spent mostly in play. Play thus becomes an important means of self- and life-discovery. Dr. Josiah Strong says: “The impulse to play is as natural and normal as the inclination to sleep or the desire to eat; and when we understand its true meaning, we find that it is not simply a permissible thing, but a divinely ordered thing. If God gives the impulse, fathers ought to provide the opportunity for expression of the impulse under the best sort of conditions. If we wish our boys to develop habits of honesty, courtesy and unselfishness, appreciation of justice and chivalry, we must provide opportunity for practice of these desirable characteristics.”

What wonderful opportunity the father has to play with his children in swimming, hiking, coasting, skating, tennis, baseball, football, running, calisthenics, and indoor games of many kinds! As the children engage in vigorous play with their father, their personalities unfold and they grow in his likeness and image. The spiritual father will always seek throughout all the play to encourage and develop gallantry, honor, cleanness, kindness, respect, courtesy, ability to be a good loser, loyalty, bravery and humility.

In such play activity, fathers and children really get acquainted with each other, and the children; come to have that deep sense of love and confidence in their father. Many a disobedient, uninterested, lazy child could be made alive with a new spirit overnight if father would try playing with him for only a month. Fathers, try it and see the difference in them and in you!

THE FATHER SHOULD SPEND TIME WITH HIS CHILDREN

Roger W. Babson tells of a prominent man who became greatly concerned about his boy, and consequently went to the boy’s principal and asked for suggestions. The principal gave this very significant reply: “Resign from the presidency of the Chamber of Commerce. Leave that position to someone whose family has grown up and is not in such great need of fatherly attention as is your boy. Your first duty during the next five years, after providing the necessities of life for your family, is at home with your boy. You should help him with his lessons; you should interest him in your business; and you should become his comrade and chum. By giving the same amount of time and attention to your boy that you now give to the Chamber of Commerce, you will save your boy and also probably be the means of doing just as much good for your city. The future of every city and the future of your boy depend primarily upon giving him your personal attention. In fact, is not personal attention necessary to make any work successful?”

E. Mitchell Hodges tells the story of his meeting a very prosperous businessman. In the course of the conversation the businessman said, “Would you like to know what I’m giving my boy for Christmas?” Hodges said, “Yes.” The businessman pulled out his wallet and took from it a piece of paper with the following written on it.

“To my dear Son! I give to you one hour of each weekday and two hours of my Sunday to be yours, to be used as you want it without interference of any kind whatsoever.”

Hodges thought, I wonder what that boy will feel and think when on Christmas morning he looks at that slip of paper. If he is the average boy, he will be very much dissatisfied. If he is an unusual boy, he will realize that his father has given him something that he can never repay.

“How did you happen to reach the decision to give that present?” Hodges asked.

He said, “One day I was seated in my office and a human derelict came in to see me, and when he mentioned his name I said, ‘Lad, to see you like this—and you with such a father!’ ‘Well, I have often heard said that he was a fine man,’ the boy answered. ‘All his friends have said so. I never knew him. He was so occupied with his business and with his associations that I only saw him occasionally at meals. I never knew him.’

“That made me think and so I am going to concentrate my time on having my boy know me.” It costs to be a real father to one’s child; it costs time, love, patience, money, and time. We emphasize time for there is where the real lack is. The time is not taken.

Edgar Guest in his story, *What My Father Did for Me*, shows clearly what wonderful possibilities stand before the father as he stays with his child in those hours of loving communion of heart with heart. He says:

During our walks together, he had a way of calling my attention to men he wanted me to know, and always he talked about them. He seemed to be acting as a pair of magnifying glasses for me, enlarging the good qualities of others that I might see them clearly.

I never saw a great man without my father’s explaining to me why he was great, nor a bad man without being made to understand what made him bad. In that way I learned what traits to acquire and what faults to avoid. He was teaching me by example, and I didn’t know I was being taught.

He goes on to reveal the treasures a dad may discover to his child as he “stays with him.” “I have made good friends and true, because my father taught me how lasting friendships are made . . . I have found much happiness in life, because he taught me where happiness could be found.

“I have traveled not far, but safely, because he taught me wisely.

“I have been spared regret and shame and misery and the embarrassment of countless follies by the tact and genius of his counsel; and scarcely a day goes by, even now, that I do not discover in my heritage from him, some new vein of riches.”

Oh! The opportunity a father has to lay before the child’s developing mind the excellencies there are in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! In these times he stays with his children. Those fathers who fail to avail themselves of these priceless opportunities will never hear “Well done!” either from their children or from their Saviour!

THE FATHER SHOULD PRAY WITH HIS CHILDREN

In Ephesians 6:4, God gives a specific commandment to fathers. How many fathers obey this commandment? I have often contended that no child should ever be spanked if the father is not obedient to the command in Ephesians 6:4. Much of childhood disobedience can be traced to the parents' disobedience of the command in Ephesians 6:4 and the promise in Proverbs 22:6. In this Ephesian passage the Holy Spirit plainly implies that fathers who do not train their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord are guilty of "*provoking them to wrath*" (which is the root of disobedience very frequently). One paraphrase renders this verse: "Fathers, do not irritate your children, but bring them up tenderly with true Christian training and advice."

On this verse, Calvin says:

Parents on the other hand are exhorted not to irritate their children by unreasonable severity. [Author's note: That is, severity which is punishment of children without a faithful, loving training of them, as in daily family worship and personal companionship and counsel. Some fathers are handy with the rod of the Word. This is a rebuke to them from the Holy Spirit. This would excite hatred, and would lead them to throw off the yoke altogether. Accordingly, in writing to the Colossians, he adds, "**lest they be discouraged**" (Colossians 3:21). Kind and liberal treatment has rather a tendency to cherish reverence for their parents, and to increase the cheerfulness and activity of their obedience, while a harsh and unkind manner rouses them to obstinacy, and destroys the natural affections; but Paul goes on to say, "Let them be fondly cherished"; for the Greek word . . . which is translated bring up, unquestionably conveys the idea of gentleness and forbearance. To guard them, however, against the opposite and frequent evil of excessive indulgence, he again draws the reign which he had slackened, and adds "in the instruction and reproof of the Lord." It is not the will of God that parents in the exercise of kindness, shall spare and corrupt their children. Let their conduct towards their children be at once mild and considerate, so as to guide them in the fear of the Lord, and correct them also when they go astray.

A father's duty is to lead his children to Christ. All his spiritual efforts must be directed to this end.

In this it is best for mothers to concentrate on the daughters and the fathers on the sons, but with both parents always giving a clear testimony to the need and necessity of salvation through Christ. The father will find opportune moments—openings made by the Holy Spirit—for him to press the invitation upon the child. At how early an age can this be done?

If the child is reared around a family altar and if the child has a sense of fellowship and confidence in the father, he may then be led to Christ very early. We would say as early as two, and surely this tremendous decision should not be put off by the child after he is five. A faithful mother or father who follows the principles taught in this book can lead his children to Christ before they are five!

After the child has accepted Christ, the father will pray with him. It will be the delight of the child's heart to have father pray with him about his problems. The father in these times of spiritual ministry to his children will find himself sharing many of the children's inmost fears, doubts, and problems.

The teacher at school; the lessons so hard to understand; the children—some friendly and some mean and naughty—any or all these experiences and problems in their life they are most likely to share with father in these intimate, holy times of spiritual fellowship.

The sight of father praying and reverently talking of the things of God and hearing father as he sets forth needed counsels and encouragements, will never be forgotten.

Gypsy Smith speaks most beautifully of his father's life and example. He says,

Our first idea of God came from Father's beautiful life in the Gypsy tent—a life which was like the blooming of a flower, whose beauty won us all. If Father had lived one life in a meeting and another in the Gypsy tent, he would not have been able to rejoice today over his five children converted. But the beauty of Father's character was most seen in his home life. We dearly loved to have him all to ourselves. Nobody knew as well as we children what a fine, magnificent character he was. Whenever we were tempted to do things that were at all doubtful, we at once thought of Father, and if we had any suspicion that the course of conduct we contemplated would not be pleasing to him, we at once abandoned all idea of following it.

Someone has said that three percent of a child's sense impressions come through his sense of touch, taste, and smell. Twelve percent of his sense impressions come through his sense of hearing, and eighty-five percent through his sense of sight! Thus the power of such a holy example!

The blessings of a spiritual father can never fully be measured or known this side the great judgment seat of Christ. We think of Zacharias, the spiritually minded father of John the Baptist. When John was born his father folded him to his bosom and, looking with inexpressible tenderness upon the babe, he spoke those wondrous words of divine illumination (Luke 1:68-79) that close with a father's loving benediction and heartfelt dedication of his son (Luke 1:76-79). **“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”**

What a benediction and dedication of son by father! When—after he had reached the age of three or four? Ah, no, at John's birth! Is this not a worthy example for every spiritual father to follow? What Zacharias did then set the tone and atmosphere of all his ministry of God to his son in the years following. Quite naturally it followed that **“the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit”** (Luke 1:80). For lack of parental love and true spiritual guidance, the children are paying a terrible price.

If fathers (and mothers) will not devote special time each day to their children, they may rest assured the world, the flesh, and the devil will. We quote words from an editorial in *The Herald of His Coming* that should stir every parent to action.

Have you ever seen a drunk fifteen-year-old boy? You may not, if you lead secluded lives away from the pulse of American youth. But again you may, for there are from two to three times as many of them in 1951 as there were in 1941. You can hardly believe other facts about the average American fifteen-year-old boy: that he, at his tender years, is supposed to have enough knowledge of contraceptives and prophylactics to keep him from “getting into trouble”; that federal agents investigating wide-spread marijuana and heroin addiction among schoolchildren find too many of them under sixteen years of age.

“Alcoholics Unanimous!” is the warning of Dr. John Almack, Stanford University professor. “So we’re going if the present trend continues! About fifty per cent of high school and college students use alcohol, and it is becoming a problem among junior high students thirteen and fourteen years old.

Do dry statistics about the soaring number of illegitimate births among our American girls go in one ear and out the other? Perhaps the jolt many of us need is to go to that hospital corridor and hear the piercing wail of a little thirteen-year-old girl in labor—frightened, panicky, bringing forth an unwanted baby in shame. Oh, the horror and pathos of those little American child-mothers, stumbling into maternity homes, hiding out for long months, facing alone an ordeal that is difficult enough surrounded by love and society’s approval!

What a grim day of reckoning is coming for all those hellish forces which conspired to put her there—from the liquor dealers to the Hollywood harlots, setting her an example of adultery; from the licentious comics publishers to the dance-crazy parents who placed her in temptation. Here is where “finished sin” demands its cruel payment, where a sex-mad culture traps its little bewildered victims . . . So widespread is this problem in our land that public school systems in at least two states, Michigan and Minnesota, have assigned teachers to conduct regular classes among the young schoolgirls living in maternity homes.

There are records of over 100,000 such misfortunes, but officials say, “Make it three times that many, and you’ll come closer to the truth.” Worse still is the growing number of grade-school girls each month, each year, entering these homes!

Weep, weep, America! Isn’t this worse than the “fixing” of basketball games which stunned and crushed officials and parents from coast to coast, and which brought such prompt disciplinary action!

Gone forever is our right to be complacent as American Christians. Only an alarmist can be a realist today! And while authorities frantically search for psychological causes and palliative measures—everything from a “lack of security” to “need for more recreation centers” and more “courses in sex and marriage,” we know deep in our souls that this is a symptom of a moral and spiritual malady, far progressed. The only step forward for America is the step back to God!

“A million youth for Christ this year!” is the bold, confident slogan of one of God’s answers, *Youth for Christ*. There are so many practical courses of action which desperate and determined Christians must take to save their youth—prayer, the family altar and vigilant parental love and instruction is the number one need they require of us. Christian schools are springing up from coast to coast, requiring our financial assistance, whether we have children or not. Youth evangelism, planned programs of work and play, challenges to service—all are needed. May God help us to salvage this crucial generation!

THE FATHER’S RESPONSIBILITY SHOULD NOT BE AVOIDED

All too many fathers are seeking to avoid their responsibilities to their children, pleading that they are tired from the day’s work or otherwise not capable.

Frederick Arnold Kummer writing in *Good Housekeeping* on “The Father in Child Training,” makes splendid suggestions in regard to the responsibility of parents.

The responsibility of the father in the training of the child is one he should welcome. It is not only unfair, but often inadequate, to leave the entire duty of home training to the mother. The growing child sees his father as a vastly important character, who vanishes from his little world early in the morning and usually returns to it in the evening, tired, hungry, with no time for his children except to bid them goodnight. This of course, is not right. Neither the child nor the father is getting out of their relationship what he should. If, but slowly, surely, the child grows up to exclude his father from his little world, what hope can there be of mutual understanding when the days of childhood are past and real problems take place of imaginary ones? The writer fully understands how little time the busy father usually has; but even a half-hour of intimate association with a child daily, a kindly interest in his affairs, a helping hand with his lessons, a suggestion as to the books he should read, would be of the utmost value in establishing a basis of comradeship.

Edgar A. Guest has given us some beautiful thoughts on what he considers to be his real job as a father. He says, "If I don't help my boy, Bud, to grow up right, I'll call myself a failure, no matter how much money I make, or how big a reputation I get.

"I have a number of tasks to do, all of which I should like to do well. To be a failure in any one of them would be disappointing; yet I could bear that without whimpering if I were sure I had not failed the boy . . . Not so much of me in the bank, and more of me and of my best in the lad, is what I should like to show at the end of my career . . . For me to succeed as a father, he must succeed. Unless my boy comes to manhood fit for the respect of his fellow men, I shall have been a failure. The glory of our handwork lies not in ourselves, but in our children." Edgar Guest relates his thoughts to the son, but the same conclusions hold true whether the child be son or daughter.

THE BUILDER

A builder builded a temple;
He wrought it with grace and skill;
Pillars and groins and arches
All fashioned to work his will.
Men said as they saw its beauty,
"It shall never know decay;
Great is thy skill, O builder!
Thy fame shall endure for aye."

A teacher builded a temple
With loving and infinite care,
Planning each arch with patience,
Laying each stone with prayer.
None praised his unceasing efforts,
None knew of his wondrous plan,
For the temple the teacher builded
Was unseen by the eyes of man.

Gone is the builder's temple,
Crumbled into the dust;
Low lies each stately pillar,
Food for consuming rust.
But the temple the teacher builded
Will last while the ages roll,
For that beautiful unseen temple
Was a child's immortal soul.

— Author Unknown

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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