

ARE YOU A FATHER OR A SPERM DONOR?

Today's Text: (1) Prov. 1 (2) Eph. 6: 1-4

Extracts:

- 1. My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck. My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent [Prov. 1: 8-10]**
- 2. And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord [Eph. 6: 4]**

According to the latest (2000) United States census, there are 105.5 million households in that country. Of that number, married couple households account for 51.7%, female households (no husbands), 12.2% and male households (no wives), 4.2%. A whopping 32% consists of "non-family" households (34 million), of which 25.8% contains people who live alone (27.2 million).¹ A non-family household is where a person lives alone or shares with non-relatives. Young persons, divorcees, widows and the aged are the majority in this category.

Those statistics suggest that in 13 million households, the men are absent and in another 38.4 million households, the men are either living alone (4.4 million) or with non-relatives (34 million). The likelihood is that a good number of these men are also fathers, that is, have had children from a failed marriage or outside of it. But are they contributing to the wholesome raising of their children? Do they know where their children are?

Increasingly, the majority of households in the Caribbean, as in Europe and America, are becoming single-parent homes, headed by women. Where there are children, the single mother plays the role of father with its attendant role conflict especially with respect to the sons. In some cases, such sons may know (and bear the names of) their biological fathers who contribute little or nothing to their upbringing. In most cases, mothers hide paternity information from their children. Are the fathers of such children real fathers or mere sperm donors? How can sons from such homes understand the concept of God as Father? Even where you are supposedly living with your wife and children, can you still call yourself a father while behaving irresponsibly? These are some of the issues discussed in today's lesson. We shall use Proverbs Chapter 1 as our study guide.

¹ Households and Families: 2000 Census Brief, Table 1, www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-8.pdf

1. Types of fathers

George Bush, Sr., the father of the current President of the United States, George W. Bush, is in his eighties. The President is in his fifties and he has just won re-election after a very close contest. His brother, Jeff Bush, is the Governor of Florida. When Jeff was asked by Larry King of the CNN the day before the Presidential Election (held on Tuesday, 2 November 2004) how his father felt, Jeff said that the old man was all nerves and praying for his son's victory. The next day, as the election results were being released, we all saw on television the President's parents sitting close to him in the White House (the official residence of the American President). What does that tell us about the relationship between the President and his father? Close, of course!

Unfortunately, most of us do not have that luxury. Some of us come from homes where we wish we did not know our fathers because they are abusive and irresponsible. Some fathers only know their rights but not their responsibilities. They think that they have done too much already to perform their biological role! Some of us would wish we had known our real fathers that our mothers are doing so much to hide from us. The search for biological parents is now a major pursuit among adopted children in the United States.

In characterizing His relationship with His Father, Jesus said, "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner" [Jn 5: 19]. In the human context, how can a son be under his father's influence if he is not there when he needs him? He represents the first man that his daughter will ever know. How he treats his wife shows his son how to relate to his future wife. The father's role in a home cannot be eliminated without adverse psychological and spiritual consequences for the children. Therefore, the human father plays a significant role in leading his children to understand and appreciate how they can build harmonious relations with other people, and relate to God as their Father.

There are fathers and there are fathers but they are not all the same! Let us consider the following types of fathers:

a) *The sperm donor!*

A sperm donor is a man who goes from one woman to another sowing wild oats. He has no desire to marry or to have children. When he gets a woman pregnant in the process, he does not accept responsibility. Even when he does, he only lends his name to the child but not his/her upbringing.

Some sperm donors may be married but they contribute little or nothing to the upbringing of their children. This is common in homes where the man has had multiple marriages, such as serial monogamy that is practiced in

Western societies. It can also be found where a man has multiple wives (who may share a common family home or leave in separate homesteads), as in some African and Moslem societies. The burden falls on each mother to raise her children in a generally adversarial environment. Nevertheless the father still provides a general character tone that applies to all the children, and it is usually not a healthy one.

b) *The single parent*

Some fathers may have accepted children without legally marrying their mothers. For example, Gideon had 70 sons from several wives. In addition, he had a son, Abimelech, by his female servant that he never married. When their father died, Abimelech obtained help from his mother's people and killed all but one of Gideon's 70 sons in order to inherit his father's estate [**Judg. 8: 30- 9: 21**]. That happened because Gideon had counted him as a son.

Some fathers are widowed or separated or divorced but have retained close relationships with their children. Unless they live under the same roof or father-son relationships are spiritually guided, a father's influence under such circumstances can be limited. For example, after Sarah's death, Abraham married Keturah who bore him 6 children, in addition to Ishmael, his first son by Hagar, and Isaac, the child of promise by Sarah. While he was still alive, he gave gifts to Hagar and Keturah's children and sent the latter away from Isaac as he had earlier done with Hagar and Ishmael. That he was able to maintain family harmony as a single parent is borne out by the fact that Isaac and Ishmael jointly buried him after his death [**Gen. 25: 1-9**].

c) *The husband*

There is a saying that there are many fathers but a few husbands. The husband is the man who is legally and *spiritually* married to the mother of his children by birth or adoption. Isaac was the husband of Rebekah, the mother of Esau and Jacob. Joseph was the husband of Mary and the *foster father* of *Jesus* her son.

The husband plays a dual role in the home. He is the husband of his wife and the father of their children. As a husband, he is expected to dwell with his wife "with understanding, giving honour to the wife as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life" so that his "prayers may not be hindered" [**1 Pet. 3: 7**]. As a father, he is to train up his "child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it" [**Prov. 22: 6**]. He is not to provoke his "children to wrath but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" [**Eph. 6: 4**].

From the forgoing, we see that being a father is a spiritual responsibility and only God can lead us to success in the matter. That is the point being made in the book of Proverbs.

2. Like father like son?

On his death bed, David instructed his son, “*keep the charge of the Lord your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, 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*” [1 Kgs 2: 1-3]. On ascending to the throne, the first thing that King Solomon did was to go to Gibeon to offer thanks to God. At night, God appeared to him in a dream and asked what favour he wanted from Him. Solomon asked for wisdom to enable him to be a successful ruler. God granted him wisdom and understanding such that “there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you” [1 Kgs 3: 3-12]. In his lifetime, Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs and wrote one thousand and five songs [1 Kgs 4: 32]. Therefore, what we find in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastics and Song of Solomon are a *representative sample!*

The first few chapters are like a memo from a loving father to his dear son. We shall concentrate on Chapter 1 where the critical principles are well laid out. Let us highlight a few of them:

a) *Son, I am telling you what has worked for me!*

Solomon writes, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” [Prov. 1: 7]. A father is laying before his son two roads: the wise and the foolish. From his own experience, the father is advising his son to take “Wisdom Lane” instead of “Foolish Avenue.” The first is based on the fear of God while the second is based on human wisdom. Therefore, as David had earlier instructed his son, Solomon, those who fear the Lord are on the road to success and prosperity.

A father should never shy away from telling his son the truth, no matter the circumstances. Unfortunately, many fathers show bad example and teach their children how to cheat and take short cuts to success. Criminals live in homes, among their parents and siblings in some cases. The family members know about their criminal activities and may even be beneficiaries of the loot. The day such people are caught and brought before the courts for trial, it is the same family that will come before television cameras to allege frame up or persecution!

b) *Always listen to Mummy and I*

Having established that he puts God first in everything that he does, the father now instructs his son, “My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the instruction of your mother, for they will be a graceful ornament on your head and chains about your neck” [vv. 8-9].

As young people grow up, they come under the influence of peers, television and other forces beyond the home. Some young people would rather follow what they see on television or hear at school or work rather than obey their parents’ instructions. Well, you cannot force your views on them. You can only advise. The father of the Prodigal Son knew that his son was making a big mistake to ask for his share of the estate. He gave it to him and after squandering it, he returned home humiliated, humbled and repentant. What better way was there for his father to convey the message of obedience? A graceful ornament on the head and chains about the neck were things of much value in the Jewish culture of Solomon’s times. They represent honour and respect among the people. Children who honour their parents have been assured by God of long life and prosperity [Ex. 20: 12; Eph. 6: 3]. Is that not what we all long to enjoy?

c) *Watch the company you keep!*

The father told his son, “My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent” [Prov. 1: 10]. To entice is to show a person the reward while hiding the associated dangers or evil. Sinners will entice us to accompany them to shed innocent blood by emphasizing, “all kinds of precious possessions” and spoils that “we shall fill our houses with” [vv. 11-13]. But Daddy says to his son, “My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path; for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood” [vv. 15-16].

How often have you questioned your children on the kind of company they keep? Do you know the family background of your children’s best friends? Do you know how they spend their “quality” time? Unless you maintain an open relationship with your children, they will never ask or tell you anything.

d) *Here is the radar to guide you!*

Most times, your son may not be able to differentiate good from bad company. Here is Daddy’s radar to guide you: “Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird” [v. 17]. In other words, you cannot set a trap for a bird that is watching you! This is analogous to exercising the spirit of discernment, which is of course one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12: 10]. We have the grace to ask God to give us any gifts that we desire [v. 31].

Teach your son to weigh every advice and demand from company and friends against the word of God. Whatever contradicts it will lead to trouble sooner than later. If he follows that simple rule, he can go anywhere and come out safely.

In summary, a father has shown his son the road to success in life. The foundation of that road is the fear of God. Continuous access to that road comes from obedience to instructions from Spirit-led parents and elders. However, the son has the *choice* to follow those instructions and good examples. If he does not, there are bad consequences, such as calamity, terror, distress and anguish [**Prov. 1: 26-27**]. Only those who can steer their children away from the brink can correctly be addressed as fathers. The rest of us, who do not do so, even when they are under the same roof with their children, are mere sperm donors!

3. Conclusion

Jesus has demonstrated what influence a good father can have in his son's life. At His birth and baptism, His Father let everyone know that this was His beloved Son [**Lk 2: 8-14; Lk 3: 21-22**]. At age 12, Jesus was already about His Father's business [**Lk 2: 49**]. Jesus only did what He saw His Father doing [**Jn 5: 19**].

In general, we reap what we sow. A father who shows his children bad examples in immorality and unprincipled conduct should not be surprised if they follow in his footsteps. In many homes, there is no culture of fear of the Lord. They do not pray together. In fact, God is hardly mentioned. In many so-called Christian homes, the children see so much hypocrisy in their fathers' lives. Where the father is a single parent, the children see fornication or adultery by a father who is preaching abstinence to them. That is not the example that Jesus has taught us in His relationship with His Father!

Can your son call you father with love and respect? Have you truly represented your heavenly Father to your earthly son so that he can accept your heavenly Father as His Father also? If you have, then we can heartily call you a father. Otherwise, you are a mere sperm donor!