

Who's Your Daddy?

Genesis 34:2-5

Texas Governor Ann Richards made a name for herself at the 1988 Democratic National Convention with a keynote address that revolved around the rhetorical question, "Where was George?" ("George" was then Vice President George Bush-and he was busy in Washington!) **Richards' speech implied that Vice President Bush was not as involved as he should have been in the affairs of the Reagan administration.** The Democratic audience greeted her campaign rhetoric enthusiastically, but history reveals that in 1988 there were plenty of voters who apparently felt that George was right where he should have been.

Perceived absenteeism in the political arena is definitely a negative that can cost a candidate votes. The cost of absenteeism in the family can be far more destructive and longer lasting. Kay Arthur said, "Strong, stable, godly men are the greatest need of our time."

We are using the life of Joseph to gather truths for this year's Family series. The great thing about the stories in the Bible is *not* that the *happened*, but that they *happen* today. And the truth of the matter is we can find *our* story in *their* stories.

Joseph's father, Jacob, was the biblical prototype of a modern species that is far from extinct: the do-nothing dad!

Jacob loved his children, but he was not very involved in their day-to-day lives. That fact was clear many times during their years in Shechem but never more powerfully than in his response when his daughter, Dinah, was raped by a Canaanite prince.

Dinah was the daughter of Leah and the prince intended to have her, one way or another, from the moment he first saw her. Perhaps because she was a descendant of Abraham and he was a member of the royal family of King Hamor, he doubted if a legitimate match could be made. Whatever his reasoning, he took her by force and then asked his father, the king, if arrangements could be made for a marriage between them.

You might imagine that Jacob was outraged by this behavior against one of his own children, but you would be wrong. He heard about the

defilement of Dinah and decided that in this instance a "wait and see" stance would be best. Her brothers were out in the fields with the livestock at the time, and Jacob did nothing at all until their return. By the time the king of Shechem arrived to bargain with Jacob, the brothers had learned of Dinah's rape and their anger was compounded by their father's lack of concern, to the point that they killed over a thousand people in a rage of anger.

If we could talk to Jacob today about his experience as a father, the interview might go something like this: "Jacob, what did you do when your daughter Dinah was raped?" "Well, nothing, but I heard about it, and it really made me mad." "I see. What about when your sons slaughtered over one thousand people in revenge? Did you do anything then?" "Oh, that. Nothing. I just thought the sooner we forgot about it the better." "Jacob, what about when your oldest son Reuben slept with one of your wives? What did you do about that?" "Well, nothing. I knew that it happened, though...and I couldn't believe he didn't know any better. But the embarrassment of a confrontation could have really been unpleasant." "Jacob, what did you do when you saw the hatred and jealousy that your other ten sons had for Joseph? Didn't you realize your favoritism sowed the seeds of rivalry and division in your home?" "I guess I didn't realize it would be such a problem. I didn't do anything. I mean, after all boys will be boys."

Far too many of today's dads have much in common with Jacob: they have abdicated their God-given responsibilities as the spiritual leaders of their homes. Jacob was a man who knew God, yet he never applied the knowledge of God and His principles to his role as a father. Being the male biological parent of a child does not make a man a true father; any more than being under a carport would make him a Chevrolet! Fatherhood implies a relationship, and a man who is uninvolved in the lives of his children and unaware of their struggles, successes, dreams, and desires is not really a father in the true sense of the word.

To understand the next part of this story, you must remember that Jacob was not the most honest of men, so his sons did not inherit much respect for honesty. He had deceived his own father, Isaac, and stolen his brother Esau's birthright. And that was not the end of his dishonesty. He cheated and he lied, and his sons followed the pattern he had set. So Joseph's brothers accepted King Hamor's offer on the condition that every male of the Canaanite population be circumcised, a condition they amazingly accepted. (You may think that this seems an incredibly high cost for a woman who was already "used," but there was much more at stake. By intermarrying with the sons

of Abraham, the Canaanites planned to take control of their livestock and their property, thus increasing their own power.)

On the third day after the Canaanites were circumcised, brothers Simeon and Levi invaded the city and killed every male there with their swords, including the king and his son. They took Dinah from the house of the king, and they looted the city because of what the prince had done to their sister. How did Jacob react? He did nothing. He could hardly condemn them for lying to the Canaanites; he had done as much and more when he was younger.

Too often a father allows the all-consuming quest for fame and fortune to take his time and attention from his family. Even Jacob fell prey to this problem of priorities and found himself climbing the rungs of the ladder of success. When his sons murdered an entire village in revenge for the rape of their sister, he worried more about the monetary ramifications than the moral implications. After all, wiping out an entire village could be bad for business!

His chief concern was not for the mass slaughter of the citizens of the village, but that his sons' actions had made it difficult for him to conduct business. He also feared that the few men left living in the land would band together against him and attack his family. Jacob's sons were filled with anger and could not believe their father had not defended Dinah's honor. They insisted they had done only what *he* should have done and failed to do.

Our society continues to applaud the successful man more than the family man, but the truth is if you are genuinely a family man, you are a successful man. Frederick Flick was a West German industrialist worth more than \$1.5 billion. Prior to his death he controlled some 300 companies and conglomerates. A profile of this highly successful businessman in a national magazine said that he had made all the right moves when it came to accumulating wealth. However every one of his children was a failure. Peter Drucker would have called Flick an undeniable success, and yet according to biblical standards he was a dismal failure. Why? Because he neglected to give his children what they needed from a father: love and leadership. When Flick's wife died, he buried her at 3:00 P.M., went back to the office at 5:00, and never broke stride. However distorted, his priorities were set, and his actions reinforced them at every turn.

In our fast-paced society, one of the things that are desperately needed in our homes is a father. Although it is true that at every age children need to presence of a loving and caring male role model, that need becomes the greatest during the teen years. In their absence, mothers are left to handle the everyday problems that God intended to be shared by both mother and father.

For example, financial problems, social problems, disciplinary problems, and moral problems, many times, become mountains instead of mole-hills, simply because they are not shared problems. This is occurring in millions of families headed by single mothers today, and heaven only knows how difficult their task has become. Not only are they doing a job that should have been shouldered by two, they must also deal with behavioral problems that fathers are more ideally suited to handle. It is generally understood that a man's larger size, deeper voice, and masculine demeanor make it easier for him to deal with defiance in the younger generation. Having said all of that, I have observed that many mothers raise their teenagers alone and do the job with excellence, but it is a challenging assignment.

In my years of ministry and counseling, I have discovered that most fathers do not intentionally shortchange their families or admit that they value their careers, or hobbies, or whatever, over their role as parent. Nevertheless the fact remains that an overwhelming percentage of today's families are without a full-time dad. We have passive fathers in the home because the lion's share of their energy is spent outside of it.

Through my forty years of ministry, I have talked with many parents who want the church to instill values and to educate their children concerning life. And I can honestly say that I have tried to do that. And although it is true the church can certainly help in these areas, but no church, school, or summer camp can be expected to raise children and successfully guide them through the maze of childhood and adolescence. There is absolutely no substitute for a parent's time in a child's life.

Writer and speaker Jerry B. Jenkins said that one of the commitments he made to his wife, Dianna, early in their marriage was to spend the hours after work and before his children's bedtime with them, no matter what. Even on those evenings when his sons didn't want to play ball or his help with their homework or even to talk with him, he made himself available to them without fail. "Quality time" is a concept invented by the folks who made one-minute management famous. While quality time is important, it cannot

compensate for the *quantity* of time required to raise well-adjusted children. What kids need from their parents (both of them!) is time, time, and more time.

Perhaps because we are pulled in every direction by the demands of daily life, we cling to the myth that we can plan and schedule the kind of time that will satisfy the needs of our children as we do other things, and that it will all fit neatly into our already-overloaded agendas. Working parents everywhere breathed a sigh of relief when the concept of "quality time" provided an escape from the guilt caused by parenting on the run. What even the hardcore advocates of quality time have discovered, however, is that in actuality such time can rarely be scheduled. It grows out of ordinary everyday events, can cost next-to-nothing, and thrives on spontaneity.

Bathing a pet, planting a shrub, baking cookies, taking a bath, being tucked in at bedtime, or folding the laundry all provide spontaneous opportunities for genuine quality time. The richest moments between parent and child are seldom pre-planned and scheduled on the calendar. You simply have to be there when they happen.

Jacob did not have the kind of resources we have today on the subject of learning to be an effective father. After all, there were not many parenting seminars taught in West Canaan in his day! And yet in Deuteronomy 6:5-9, one of the books of the Pentateuch, right in the middle of Jewish law we discover these timeless words of wisdom, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words that I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 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."

This passage speaks of two principles that are critical to men who would be effective fathers: one, a personal loving devotion to God Himself, and two, something I call "saturation leadership." Without a personal, passionate, devoted relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, it is difficult for any man to be the kind of father whose children will one day call him "blessed." God's strength and guidance are essential because the job is enormous.

The rest of this passage establishes the second principle; the idea of a continual and multi-faceted approach to teaching your children what really matters in life. This approach speaks of *consistency*. It speaks of personal example. It requires time, and it means that every word heard or every action observed bears a solid witness to our children that our agenda and God's agenda are one and the same. Most importantly, in time it becomes as natural as breathing. The method is simply teach/talk/write/bind. In everything we do, we must demonstrate that God comes first. We need to live out the principles of God's Word in a transparent and honest way before our children. This scripture says we are to wear God's commands on our foreheads, and the Jews of the Old Testament literally did just that. They wore headbands that contained the law as a reminder of their covenant with God in much the same way that a wedding band today reminds us of our covenants with our mates. The idea is simply to keep our commitment before us at all times.

A teenager was asked what he pictured when he thought of his father. His response was almost instantaneous: "a big mouth." When asked what he would like to see, he was equally as quick to reply: "a big ear." Perhaps the most important instruction in Moses' words is to talk to our children. Communication is a two-way exchange! Jacob may have observed his sons, but it doesn't appear that he either talked to them much or knew the condition of their hearts. In fact, he seemed more interested in commerce than communication.

It is a fact, too many fathers never learn to communicate with their children, and the silence that begins in childhood remains unbroken. It is true that communication is sometimes a very difficult thing to get a handle on, and most of us have not yet learned. For example, the same kid who used to talk a mile a minute and ask a million questions has now become a teen-ager and has strangely enough, reduced his vocabulary to nine monosyllabic phrases. They are, "I dunno," "Maybe," "I forget," "Huh?" "No!" "Nope," "Yeah," "Who -- me?" and "He did it." Otherwise, only static comes through the receivers - groans, grunts, growls, and gripes. And trying to have a conversation becomes a time of apprehension more than a time of enjoyment.

Let me give you a couple of thoughts when it comes to communicating with your children.

First, your conversations should be safe. Now listen and get this – whatever is said and done when your family is together must not make people

feel bad, disappointed, threatened, stupid, or wrong. That means that if you are going to get the most out of communicating with your children, it must not be done in anger.

Second, share your concerns out of a heart filled with love and compassion. Please hear me right here – sharing your love and concerns are much more important than shouting orders and condemnation. Sharing your feelings of love and compassion helps your child to feel they are accepted regardless of their mistakes and stupid decisions.

Third, do not allow your communications to become nothing more than criticism. Listen, no one likes to be criticized, even if they have made mistakes. Constant criticism breeds low self-esteem, destroys confidence, encourages performance anxiety, causes distrust, and results in the avoidance of family events. **And one of the great tragedies of criticism is that children who are constantly being criticized grown up to be parents who are constantly critical of their children.** Therefore, it becomes a vicious cycle.

We expect our children to speak our language and to operate on our timetables. Instead, when our children are ready to speak, we must be ready to listen and we must learn to speak their language.

When it comes to this matter of communication, the Bible tells us that Jesus was a man who not only understood the language of children but also loved to communicate with them. The Gospel of Mark records an occasion where children approached Jesus and were shooed away by His disciples. The disciples believed that their Master had more important things to do than baby-sit. **But do you remember how Jesus responded?** He reprimanded them and then personally invited the children into his arms so that He could hold and bless them, saying, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them."

Now Jesus was a busy man. His agenda was ambitious to say the least! But His actions said that nothing in His schedule was more important to Him than those children - not *preaching*, not *teaching*, and not *healing the sick*. He gave children His first priority.

Proverbs 22:6 instructs parents to "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." This is not an instruction to fathers to impose their own dogmatic constraints on their children, this verse

is a plea for fathers to study their children to determine their unique gifts and desires, and guide them in that way.

If you had an absent father, or an abusive one, you know far better than I the effects these situations can have well into adulthood. You can choose to be bound to the past, or you can look at it honestly and let God set you free from its devastating web of pain. **It will be difficult.** But for every person who lives with the memory of an earthly father who failed, there is the promise of a heavenly Father who will not - who cannot fail.

If you are not saved, why not today?

Everyone please stand for prayer.

Father,

Your Word is true. Thank you for loving me just as I am. Give me the courage to put my past in the past and trust your love, grace and guidance to carry me through. In Jesus' name. Amen.