

June 15, 2008

FATHERS: ***Take Courage and Be a Man***

We have at last come to the greatest day in the entire year – Father's Day. And although I am going to be talking directly to fathers – wives I want you to listen so that you can tell your daughters what to look for in a man. And I want you single ladies to listen so that you know how to pick a winner for a husband. And I want you single guys to listen so you will know what a real man looks like, especially those who never had a father to teach them. And I want to begin by saying it's great to be a father, and it's great to be a man. And here are the top ten reasons why:

10 You know stuff about tanks.

9 You can go to the bathroom without a support group.

8 If someone forgets to invite you to something he can still be your friend.

7 You can drop by to see a friend without bringing a little gift.

6 If another guy shows up at the same party in the same outfit, you might become lifelong buddies.

5 One wallet, one pair of shoes, one color, all seasons.

4 There is always a game on somewhere.

3 Your pals can be trusted never to trap you with, "So...notice anything different?"

2 If something mechanical doesn't work, you can bash it with a hammer and throw it across the room.

1 You can do your nails with a pocketknife.

But the truth is that there is a desperate shortage of real men and real fathers today. Real men, honest men, responsible men, men of integrity – men who lead their families righteously and without compromise; men who are fathers to their children and husbands to their wives, **men of courage**. By and large, courageous fathers have gone missing. And the breakdown of the family in America today can be traced almost directly to these missing men. It takes courage to stay with the same woman for a life time when the entire trend of the age is to have multiple partners. Only 34 percent of all children born in America will live with both biological parents thru age 18. Today nearly 50 percent of children in America do not live with a father in the house. And even if they are there, many times they are not a significant factor and their presence and influence in the home is often negligible. They are so busy providing for the family, working to maintain a lifestyle, struggling to get ahead, that the real job of raising their children is done by someone else - The schools are depended upon to give them education, the church is there to give them religion, and when those fail the courts are there to discipline them.

Erma Bombeck wrote of her father - ***Whenever I played house, the mother doll had a lot to do. I never knew what to do with the daddy doll, so I had him say, "I'm going off to work now," and threw him under the bed.*** And many fathers today are under the bed. Oh, they are good providers – they bring the bacon home, fix the car, put a roof over their families heads – but when it comes to real, meaningful involvement in their families – you have to look under the bed for them. What we need today is men of courage – fathers who are not afraid to step up and take their place as head of the family, priest of the home, warrior against all the enemies our families face, a man of courage. And it takes courage to be a father, because the awesome weight of the moral and spiritual and physical well-being of our families rests on our too inadequate shoulders. To bear this weight takes a courageous man. And not just any man – but a man that is wholly and courageously, dependent upon God.

In 1 Kings 2:2, King David was about to die and he called his son Solomon and gave him this charge: ***'I am going where everyone on earth must someday go. Take courage and be a man.'*** David could have said a lot of things – 'Don't take any wooden nickels' or 'Don't spit into the wind' or 'Always wear clean underwear' – but he didn't. The most important thing for David was that his son would be a courageous man. He was stepping into some really big shoes, he was the go-to guy now, he was going to be the leader, and he needed courage and he needed to be a man. So what does that mean, 'Take courage and be a man'; and just as importantly, how do you get there?

MEN OF COURAGE LEAD COURAGEOUSLY

For me, *Take courage and be a man* means that as a man and a father you **lead courageously**. *That means not being passive or apathetic or complacent*. Being **passive** means that you always take the easy way out – you go along to get along, and you stand committed to nothing except your own comfort. And **apathy** really means without passion. You have no great goal in view, no driving dream that spurs you on. Being **apathetic** means that you never exert yourself and you are not earnest about anything. And **complacent** means that you are satisfied to maintain the status quo. But a man needs to be energetic and passionate. Energized about the goals and dreams he has for his family, and passionate about their well-being. **It means an on-fire heart for God and white-hot passion for His purpose**. It means not putting off the hard decisions – it means taking the bull by the horns and confronting issues we'd rather leave alone. It means intentionally leading your family in all things, especially in spiritual things. **Men of courage lead courageously**.

MEN OF COURAGE ARE BRAVE

To lead courageously means that we need to be brave. Not like the guy who bragged that he had cut off the tale of a fierce man-eating lion with his pocketknife. When asked why he hadn't cut off the head, he replied, 'Somebody already did that.' But like that great cowboy theologian, John Wayne once said, '**Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway**.' It is going where you haven't gone before just because you are the leader. Courage is not the absence of fear – courage is conquering fear. It is being brave enough to stand for truth and honesty and integrity in the work place – it is being brave when confronting your child's resistance to the things of God and not caving in to pressure. *Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong*. I Corinthians 16:13 *Leonidas, King of Sparta, was preparing to make a stand with his Greek troops against the Persian army in 480 B.C. when a Persian envoy arrived. The man urged on Leonidas the futility of trying to resist the advance of the huge Persian army. "Our archers are so numerous," said the envoy, "that the flight of their arrows darkens the sun." "So much the better," replied Leonidas, "for we shall fight them in the shade."* **Men of courage are brave**.

MEN OF COURAGE ARE NOT PREOCCUPIED WITH COMFORT

To be a man of courage means not being preoccupied with comfort. Adrian Rogers tells this story: *I remember a few years ago seeing an ad in the paper for a drive in passion play. It was like a drive in movie, you could watch the story of Jesus, the passion play without ever getting out of your car. And I'll never forget the ad. It said this: "Come and experience the life of Christ all from the comfort of your own car." And I pondered that and I was overwhelmed with the truth that we will not experience the life of Christ or the life that Christ desires for us, or be the church that God desires from within our areas of comfort. We must get out of the car*. And a lot of men want to go through life from within the comfort of their own car, on their terms. 'Just give me a good sofa, a good game, and some good food and I'm set.' **Men of courage are not preoccupied with comfort**.

MEN OF COURAGE CHOOSE THE HARDER RIGHT

To be a man of courage means to choose the harder right. Every Sunday in Chapel services at West Point, the cadets repeat the Cadet's Prayer, which in part says: *"Make us choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never to be contented with half truth when whole truth can be won. Endow us with courage that is born of loyalty to all that is noble and worthy, that scorns to compromise with vice & injustice and knows no fear when right and truth are in jeopardy."* And it is the harder right that defines the courageous man.

For months Eric Liddell trained with the purpose of winning the 100-meter race at the Olympic races of 1924. Many sportswriters predicted he would win. Then Eric learned the 100-meter race was scheduled for Sunday. This posed a problem: Eric believed that he could not honor God by running in the contest on the Lord's Day. His fans were stunned by his refusal. Some who had praised him now called him a fool. All of England was in an uproar. The heads of the Olympic committee pressured him; the Prince of Wales personally blasted him. But Eric stood firm. However, a runner suddenly dropped out of the 400-meter race, scheduled on a weekday and Eric offered to fill the slot, even though this was four times as long as the race for which he had trained. And on that Sunday in 1924, Eric Liddell went out and ran the race of his life, winning in a record time of 47.6 seconds. **Men of courage choose the harder right**.

Courage often means saying no when the safe and easy course is to say nothing. Adam stood beside Eve and said nothing – a manly ‘No’ would have changed everything. And men often fall into the trap of believing that pleasing their wife and their children means never saying no – when in fact that would be exactly the right answer. **Your wife and children want a rock – not a rag doll.** And the reason I go back to Adam is because he set the pattern for us guys, like it or not. In a situation where he had a clear command from God, the only thing God said don’t do, Adam caved. And I think he caved to the pressure to make things easier at home.

In the movie, ‘Cinderella Man’ a true story of James J. Braddock, there is a great scene that demonstrates the hard decision. It is in the middle of the Great Depression, long lines of men stand outside factories and plants and dock gates hoping against hope to be picked to work that day. And one day James comes home from a fruitless search for work to find that his oldest boy has stolen a sausage from the local butcher. He wasn’t an habitual thief – he was hungry and there was no food in the house. And furthermore, he had just learned that his friends down the street had been sent away from the family to live with relatives where there was food and he did not want that to happen to him. And he thought if he could only get some food, they wouldn’t send him away. When James, his dad came home, he could have done a lot of things – he could have said nothing, he could have said ‘Stealing is bad son, but I’m out of work and surely God wouldn’t want us to starve, the butcher will never miss it, and nobody else knows – it’s okay, just this once.’ But James was a courageous man. He took his son and the sausage back to the butcher, his son confessed his crime and they left. And outside the shop, James turns to his son and says, **‘No matter what, no matter how bad it gets – we don’t steal – ever.’ Men of courage make the hard decisions.**

MEN OF COURAGE LOVE THEIR WIVES SACRIFICIALLY

To be a man of courage means that you love your wife sacrificially. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, Ephesians 5:25 Packed in this little phrase is a lot. It means that you love her first. before yourself, before your pursuits and hobbies, before your children, and especially before your friends. Are you willing to sacrifice your comforts and your pleasure for your wife, and put her first? A courageous man is. The text goes on to say, ***‘Husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies...no one hates his own body but lovingly cares for it...’*** Lovingly caring for your body means to nourish and cherish it, and you make sacrifices in order to do it. Men, are you nourishing your wives with the milk and meat of the Word? Are you going with her to the throne of grace – are you leading the way there? Men are you cherishing your wife? The word means to ‘make much of’. Do you make much of your wife? Do others see that? Do your children see that she is the most important person on earth to you? ***Men of courage love their wives sacrificially.***

MEN OF COURAGE TEACH THEIR CHILDREN TO BE LOVERS OF GOD

To be a man of courage means that you teach your children to be courageous lovers of God. That firstly means that you, yourself are a lover of God, and that you spend intentional time with your children, talking about God, reading in His word with them, worshipping God with them, and praying with them. ***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 door-posts of your house and on your gates.*** Deuteronomy 6:6-9

Research has revealed that if a child is the first person in a household to become a Christian, there is a 3.5 percent probability that everyone else in the household will become Christians. If the mother is the first to accept Christ, the percent goes up and 17 percent of the homes will see the remainder of its members trust Christ. ***But if the father is first, there is a 93 percent probability that everyone else in the household will follow.*** When father goes first spiritually, good things happen at home. Fathers are incredibly important in the spiritual life of their children. It’s your job men, to lead the way in loving God and repeating the old, old story of Jesus and His love. Talk to them about God. Tell them stirring stories of courageous men and women of God. Inspire them with the exploits of the great people of God. Tell them about men like Nicolas Ridley and Hugh Lattimer who on a crisp October day in 1555 walked out the doors of Bocardo Prison to be burned at the stake for their proclamation of the gospel. Tell them how Hugh Lattimer turned to Nicolas Ridley as they approached the stakes set in the tinder dry fire wood, and with courage and confidence said, ***‘Be of good cheer Ridley. Play the man! We shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace as I trust shall never be put out!’***

Tell them about women like Gladys Aylward who led 100 children in the cold and snow over the mountains in China to safety with only the courage and confidence in a faithful and all-powerful God to sustain and keep her.

Tell them about men like Richard Wormbrand who spent years in prison for his faith, and though beaten and broken by torture and starvation, could still say, **'Every night in prison I danced for joy because of Christ!'**

Tell them about the two young Moravian missionaries who sold themselves into slavery to reach the slaves under cruel tyranny on a West Indies plantation, and as their ship set sail proclaimed, **'May the Lamb who was slain receive the reward of His suffering!'**

Tell them about all the saints of God who counted the cause of Christ more worthy than their own comfort and ease, who braved the storms of nature and the hostility of men to bring the light of the gospel to the lost and dying, who endured terrible persecutions and suffering, who didn't accumulate earthly riches and worldly fame, but poured out their lives as a drink offering to the One who had won their hearts and captured all their affections. Tell them stories of courage. ***Men of courage teach their children to be courageous lovers of God.***

MEN OF COURAGE ARE MEN OF THE WORD

To be a man of courage means you give yourself to the study and practice of the Word. If you look back at 1 Kings 2, David goes on to tell Solomon that the way to be strong and courageous is to *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,*

When the man of God, Moses died, and weight of leadership fell on Joshua's shoulders, this is what God told him: *Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.* Joshua 1:6-8

How do we lead courageously? Study the Word, meditate on the Word, let the Word of God saturate your mind, emotions and will, and do what it says. The instructions for leading courageously given to Joshua by Moses did not include the 7 Habits Of Highly Effective Leaders – he said, get into the Word of God. That will prepare you, that will sustain you, that will cause you to be very strong and courageous. Fathers and men, if you are not in the Word of God, there is no possibility of being strong and courageous. ***Men of courage are men of the word.***

Our gracious heavenly Father,

Teach us how to live courageously. Strengthen our hearts and minds to play the man and not back down in the face of opposition and discouragement. Don't let us coast and drift – don't let us compromise or look to satisfy our penchant for comfort and ease. Deliver us from passivity, apathy and complacency. Build in us the heart of a man who loves You supremely and loves our wives sacrificially. Help us choose the harder right and make the hard decisions – men who are brave and stand true to what we believe, scared to death but saddling up anyway. Forgive Lord, for our lack of courage and boldness. Forgive us for letting the world dictate what it means to be a man and a father. Help us we pray to be fathers who teach their children Your Word and inspire their hearts to follow hard after You. Help us we pray to be husbands who love their wives more than ourselves. And help us to be men of the Word who are strong and courageous. O Father, we dedicate ourselves anew this morning to take courage and be a man. Ignite a fire within our hearts to worship You with abandon, serve You with passion and to live as men of God in the world, we pray in the precious and mighty name of Jesus, Amen.

***May the Lord bless you and keep you,
and make His face shine upon you.
May the Lord be gracious unto you;
May the Lord lift up His countenance on You,
and give you peace.***