

A Surprising Message from Barry Bonds

This past week Barry Bonds broke the record for lifetime home runs. Amidst controversy, cheers and mixed feelings, Barry crossed the plate, lifted his eyes heavenward and cried, "My Dad," choking back tears, then saying, "thank you." Barry's dad niched his own place in baseball history. His bio states:

Bobby Lee Bonds (March 15, 1946 – August 23, 2003) was an American right fielder in professional baseball from 1968 to 1981, primarily with the San Francisco Giants. Noted for his outstanding combination of power hitting and speed, he was the first player to have more than two seasons of 30 home runs and 30 stolen bases, doing so a record five times (the record was matched only by his son Barry), and was the first to accomplish the feat in both leagues; he became the second player to hit 300 career home runs and steal 300 bases, joining Willie Mays. Together with Barry, he is part of baseball's most accomplished father-son combination, holding the record for combined home runs, RBI, and stolen bases.

I am comparing this accomplishment with what a young man said who placed bronze in the Olympics. He had trained for years and was slated to take the gold. He crouched into position for his race. Placed his feet and hands in place and just before the gun was shot, he wondered if his dad with whom he was suffering from a strained relationship was watching. It took his concentration off the race of a lifetime and he will probably go to his grave knowing he could have placed higher.

What our dad thinks about us is crucial. I was recently reading a secular book dealing with parents who, in the author's opinion, was overbearing to the point of being "toxic." Much of what the person writing was correct. If a parent is cruel and unkind I would agree with much of what the author said. However, as I read on, I saw the smack of humanistic philosophy which has influenced her to the point of almost insisting that religious upbringing is harmful. Before I even read the summation, I was getting the gist that we should not use any coercion or discipline to guide our children in the direction they need to go. So, if you are misbehaving, it's not your fault; it's your mean parents who pushed you over the brink. There is a place where we may, with God's help, be the parents we need to be and the children we ought to be and which with God's help we can be. It is said of Jacob, "All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them" (Genesis 49:28).

As my mind echoes with the words of Barry Bonds, "My Dad, thank you!" I am moved. I am moved that with all the gruffness of his responses to the media, he holds this tender spot for his hero, his dad. It is as if to say, it doesn't matter what anybody else says, I am my father's son and today he would be proud of me. Please allow me to give some helpful advice on the vital issue of parental relationships and the effect on your life.

1. It is okay to strive to make your parents proud of you.

Individualism is okay; I encourage it. If being "your own man or woman" is inclusive of removing the prohibitions of holiness that your parents made for you, then you are wrong. Even these words sound so archaic. We are not supposed to say to someone, you are wrong. Well, allow me the catharsis to say again, "You are wrong." Drinking alcohol is still wrong - so is lying, adultery, fornication and smoking. (I am not making a list necessarily in order of debauching sins; I am simply making a point!) "I don't think I'm in love with my mate anymore; what am I supposed to do?" you may ask. I'll be glad to tell you. Stay married; keep your vow. Fall back in love. Love is a choice. Choose right. Another may say, "You know I was taught that drinking is wrong, but I've tried it; it hasn't hurt me." The Bible says, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Proverbs

20:1). I have already made some of you angry, but at the risk of you becoming carnally livid, permit me a brief exegesis of that verse. If you think it's okay to defy your parents and imbibe, you are being made a fool of by Satan himself. He mocks your brazen naivety and encourages further defiance. You are being duped and you have left wisdom far behind in your shameless and foolish quest for your own life.

If following Christ means that you must hurt those who are family members, then according to the teaching of Jesus, you must follow God. But I am asking you to consider if your parents have lifted up a standard of righteousness in the name of Christ. Before you move that fence you'd better ask, why was that fence put there to begin with. "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (Proverbs 6:20). When in doubt, play it safe! I appreciate the firm upbringing of my wife. Never once has she said, "My parents made me miss out on so much fun. They didn't let me go to the dances, dress immodestly and date wicked boys; wow! Did I ever miss out on youthful fulfillment." Today, I rise up with our children and call her blessed. But may I say a big thank you to Paul and Betty Wright who not only insisted on high standards, but also lived them in front of their kids.

Most every time I enter the pulpit to preach and teach the Word of God I am mindful of my preacher dad, who encourages me in every way in life and death, "...and by it he being dead yet speaketh" (Hebrews 11:4). When I get to heaven I long to hear from my Lord, "Well done," and then right after that I want to hear Dr. Julian Pope say, "You made me proud." I want to do nothing to disgrace my Lord or tarnish the good name my dad handed me on a silver platter.

2. Making your Heavenly Father proud is the most important goal of all.

There are some reading this whose parents are not proud of you because you have chosen a lifestyle that brings glory to God. What can you do in these cases? The Bible says, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up" (Psalms 27:10). I am thinking of a dear fiend of mine who is Jewish and has accepted Jesus Christ as his Messiah. It has cost him, at this point, the rest of his life of fatherly acceptance by his earthly father as well as rejection of his siblings. Jesus said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). Thankfully, most of the people I pastor and preach to will not be able to relate literally to this verse, but oh, for those who do relate, I challenge you - don't give up. Jacob Gartenhaus was reared in the home of a well respected rabbi. His family treated him as dead after he accepted Christ as his Savior and Lord. Jacob never quit praying and believing God. One day his dad was officiating in one of the high festivity days in Judaism when suddenly all the ritual and prophetic truths of who Jesus really is came home. In the synagogue he lifted his hands toward heaven and cried out "Jeshua! Messiah!" He found Christ, "the Everlasting Father!" (Isaiah 9:6). Even greater joy than a Barry Bonds who believed he was honoring his earthly father, is the joy of knowing you have honored your Heavenly Father.

Honor your father who is in heaven and honor your earthly parents. Following Christ will bring prodigal parents to the Lord when we stay consistent in our testimony. For those who have Christian parents, give God thanks today for the duality of the blessing of allowing heaven and earth to touch through the home you were or still are being reared.

- Pastor Pope -

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