

THE PERFECT FATHER

What is a father? What is a father supposed to be? We see the quintessential example of what a father is at the baptism of the Lord Jesus. Here you see the perfect Father interacting with His perfect Son. *"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:16,17).

1. The Father was there.

The Father was present. Matthew 3:16 tells us, *"The Heavens opened unto Him...."* Pulitzer-winning Colbert King writes of the growing number of fatherless boys in America with burgeoning criminal activity, *"...children barely known by their fathers are raised by grandparents, uncles and aunts too worn out to keep up; where the warmest attachment is to older boys with guns and attitudes to match."* Stephen Baskerville, a professor of political science at Howard University, has stated, *"Virtually every major personal and social pathology can be traced to fatherlessness more than to any other single factor."* He continues, *"Fatherlessness far surpasses both poverty and race as a predictor of social deviance. The great misconception today is that poverty is the main incubator of the criminal class. This is a widely embraced distortion of the truth. The criminal element in America is predominately a direct consequence of the fatherless home, not poverty."*

The Lord relishes saying of Himself when He comes to set up His kingdom on the new earth, *"...The LORD is there"* (Ezekiel 48:35). Hebrews 13:5 declares, *"...For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."* Oh that our children would have that same assurance from their earthly fathers!

2. The Father touched.

The Father was not only present; He was engaged. The Father made His presence felt. Matthew 3:16: *"...He saw the Spirit of God descending like a Dove, and lighting upon Him."*

John Trent, who holds a Ph.D. in marriage and family counseling, tells of an adolescent patient in a psychiatry ward named Lisa. Lisa would slump down in her chair whenever she felt afraid or sad and wrap herself in her arms, rocking back and forth repeating, "I wish...I wish...." She had been behaving this way since she was seven years of age. That is when her mother abandoned her in an orphanage. John Trent went on to say, "Lisa was trying to escape the hurt and pain she was feeling by holding herself. Lisa had no one else to hold her. She needed meaningful touching so much that she would wrap her arms around herself and try to hug away the hurt."

Children need affirmation from the people they love through the wholesome endearing touch. In ancient days when the patriarchs were prepared to invoke their blessing, they touched. *"And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not (Genesis 27:21).*

3. The Father communicated.

Matthew 3:17 says, *"And lo a voice from heaven saying...."* The Father spoke. Words are not just information; they are food. Don't let your kids starve from lack of words. Our Lord quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3 shares the significance of words: *"And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God"* (Luke 4:4). Our Lord likened His word to food. We cannot live without it. Imagine a dad calls to his son, "Suppertime! Mom has fixed your favorite -- mac and cheese with summer sausage!" "Sorry, Dad, I won't be coming to supper; I know what that tastes like!" You know that will not be the response. Maintaining health is not a matter of mere taste and we can opt to eat or not eat. If we don't eat we don't live. By the same token, a child cannot emotionally survive when a dad constantly ignores them. Many a father is not even home when they are at home. They are preoccupied with the business they brought home or their own personal entertainment. Every day and whenever possible we need to engage our children with the spoken word. The wise man speaks to his son, *"My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings"* (Proverbs 4:20).

4. The Father bonded.

The Father identified with His Son. In Matthew 3:17 He spoke, *"This is my beloved Son...."* In the first relationship we hear Adam declare, *"...This is now*

bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh..." (Genesis 2:23). Bonding requires identification. This is what baptism is all about: we identify with the Savior, who identified with us in His baptism. We see the Heavenly Father spoke the words of bonding identification at this special event.

The Bible says, *"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"* (Ephesians 6:4). *"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged"* (Colossians 3:21). When a child fails at his task, fathers should encourage the child, telling him or her how he, too, had failed at the same or similar task, rather than inferring that he had never made a mistake or experienced failure.

5. The Father let His love be known.

The Father expressed His love for the Son. In Matthew 3:17 he said, *"This is my beloved Son...."* When God said He so loved the world, He let it be known. He went to Calvary and publicly displayed it. When a man and woman really love each other they have a public wedding ceremony and let the world know it. How precious it is that at the event that introduced Jesus into His ministry, His Father said to the whole world, "I love Him." Years ago Dr. Howard Hendricks was counseling a couple who had been married for twenty years and was now considering divorce. Dr. Hendricks asked the husband when was the last time he told his wife he loved her. The man answered, "I told my wife that I loved her on our wedding day, and it stands until I revoke it." Need I even attempt to make the application?

6. The Father praised His Son.

In Matthew 3:17 the Father expressed His pleasure in the Son by saying, *"...in whom I am well pleased."* Toward the end of Jesus' ministry the Bible records, *"While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him"* (Matthew 17:5). The Father praised His Son throughout His life.

Gary Smalley and John Trent said in their book, *The Blessing*, "If words of love and acceptance are so important, why are they offered so infrequently? Here are a few reasons we have gathered from people we have counseled: 'I don't want to inflate my child's ego.' 'I'm afraid if I praise them, they'll take advantage of me and won't finish their work.' 'Communication is too much like

work. I work all day, then she expects me to work all night talking to her.' 'I just don't know what to say.' 'They know I love them without my having to say it.' 'If I get started, I'll have to make a habit of it.' The most ridiculous one given is this one: 'Telling children their good points is like putting on perfume. A little is okay; but put on too much and it stinks.'"

The perfect Father is God. Although we're not perfect, our Heavenly Father is the archetype of whom we should follow. He praised the Son and we should praise our children.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.