

MAINTAINING GOOD FATHERING SKILLS

I think every dad who is reading this right now has a deep genuine desire to be a good father; otherwise you would not be reading this article right now. I miss being with you today, but one reason I am not at Christchurch this morning is because I would sincerely like to practice what I preach; therefore, I am serving the Lord with one of my kids at her request, at her church in Missouri.

Let me give you three ways we can incorporate good fathering skills:

1. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Jesus was asked what was the first or great commandment. His answer: *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment"* (Mark 12:30). Jesus said, *"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets"* (Matthew 22:40). On this very principle (along with loving our neighbor as ourselves) all proper behavior and motivation begins. This is basic; this is vital. If we miss this, we miss everything. If we don't love God the way He should be loved, we cannot fulfill the command to love our neighbor or anybody.

We are made in the image of God. God is a Trinity, so also is man. Therefore, if we love God supremely, we love with all that we have. We love him with our heart, which is our spirit. The Bible says, *"The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly"* (Proverbs 20:27). The belly speaks of the deep inside of you. The heart is the center of who you are. The spirit of man is that place which the Lord speaks to you. If you are not in Christ, your spirit is still alienated from God and your spirit is dead to Him, yet active toward the world, the flesh, and the Devil. That's why the Bible says about the moment we get saved, *"And you hath he quickened (make alive), who were dead in trespasses and sins"* (Ephesians 2:1). When we get saved our spirit is re-activated and we now have contact with God. We are to love God by staying strong in the spirit. The Bible says of John the Baptist, *"And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto*

Israel" (Luke 1:80). The Bible also records of our Lord: *"And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him"* (Luke 2:40). Let us not just have contact with the Lord; let us nourish and grow spiritually so that the voice of God we hear in our spirit is as real as the food we eat or the air we breathe. Let us go on to love the Lord with all our soul; this is the personality of man. The soul is driven by the spirit. The language that we speak, the very words we choose, our control of temperament and the decisions we make are reflective of where we are in the spirit. Our personality is a barometer that not only we can see, but others can as well. When we love God the way we should in the soul, we don't use His name in vain, our speech is not full of vulgar double entendres, we don't lose our temper and we make the right decisions. We should love the Lord with our strength, which means we get physical with the expression of our love to the Lord. *"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts (spirit) sprinkled from an evil conscience (soul), and our bodies (physical body) washed with pure water (the Word of God)"* (Hebrews 10: 22). *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service"* (Romans 12:1). When I render my body to the Lord, I love him with my strength. This means if the Lord calls me to the mission field, I transport my body to the place in the earth He has chosen for me. If I make a visit to a lost person to win him or her to Jesus, I am loving the Lord with my strength. If I make a hospital call on a sick saint, I am giving my strength or body to Jesus. In the Old Testament the command was given thusly, *"And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might (strength)"* (Deuteronomy 6:5). In the New Testament, Jesus added one word, *"mind"* (Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30). This word is also translated *"imagination."* The Lord is telling us to love Him imaginatively. In other words, improvise, experiment, see all the ways in which we may express our love to Jesus. Never settle for the mediocre.

2. Love your wife.

The best thing you can do for your kids is to love their mother! One of the most convicting verses in the Bible for the husband is Ephesians 5:25, *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."* In the same way Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, we are to so love our wives. We therefore, love her unconditionally (she doesn't earn it). We are to love her permanently (divorce can never be considered as an

option; Christ never gives up on us). We are to love her by laying our life down for her (this is what Christ came to earth to do for His bride).

God is very serious about this. I have often wondered why so few Bible teachers emphasize I Corinthians 7:4, which says, *"The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife."* This passage quite literally says I am not my own. If I am married, I belong to not only my Lord, I belong to my wife (even as she belongs to me). My old friend, John Bishop through his severe meningitis lost all memory of who he was; all the memory of the first fort-two years of his life was erased. His wife Donna told him they we married and had been married for over twenty years. He asked her, "What is marriage?" She replied, "It means I belong to you and you belong to me." In his innocent child-like way of comprehension, from that time on John has called her, "My Donna." Would to God all of us as husbands would get what John and Donna Bishop understand!

3. Spend time with your kids.

A month before the circus came to town a father promised that he would take his boys to the "Greatest Show on Earth." On the day of the event the family was having an early supper in preparation for the evening at the circus. During supper the phone rang. The representative from work said they really needed to have a meeting; it was an emergency since he was the CEO. I believe the so-called emergency came about because some prospective business partners had come to our country from a foreign country in a surprise move and therefore the board wanted to respond favorably by calling a special meeting. The father said, "I'm sorry, family plans have been made and I cannot...." The wife waved her hand to interrupt. The father covered the mouthpiece and inquired, "Yes?" His wife then said softly, "The circus will come back to town." The dad kindly replied, "Yes, but boyhood won't." I have yet to meet a man who came to the end of his life and regretted the time he spent in the office. Sadly, many busy men have come to the end of their lives and regretted the time they did not spend with their kids. I once saw a man interviewed who was telling how he made his millions. At the end of his speech, he was asked about his kids and the man was visibly shaken. The discussion was not originally intended to go to that subject, but the whole format quickly changed as the man tearfully said, "I would give every penny of the millions of dollars I have made if I could just have one more shot with my kids."

I Corinthians 14:40 says, *"Let all things be done decently and in order."* The Greek word we translate "order" is defined as regular arrangement in time and a fixed succession of rank or character. When it comes to our home, our family is not out-ranked by our jobs or even by the church. The Christian CEO understood that his job did not hold preeminence, Christ does. In obedience to His Lord, he understood a promise to his children out-ranked the demands of his job.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and features a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right from the end of the name.