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Father's Day -- David's Advice to Solomon -- I Kings 2:1-12

Editor's Note: This "MM" is the 30th email sermon in a series we are sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. This message develops a text in I Kings 2 as King David gave a challenge to his son, Solomon. It is my prayer that this message will encourage you and those you teach. Use it as a devotional, edit it, share it, use it or components of it! May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

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Father's Day -- David's Advice to Solomon -- I Kings 2:1-12

In his book, Faith of the Fatherless, New York University psychology professor Paul Vitz studied the childhood of more than a dozen prominent atheists. He became convinced that their rejection of God is linked directly to a defective relationship with their earthly fathers. By defective, Vitz means the father died, abused his child, or abandoned him.

For example, Friedrich Nietzsche, a philosopher famous for saying "God is dead," lost his father when he was just four years old. Vitz writes that Nietzsche had "a strong, intellectually macho reaction against a dead, very Christian father" whom he perceived as weak and sickly.

The English writer Samuel Butler had a clergyman father who brutally beat him; Vitz writes that Butler revolted against both the beatings and his father's piety.

Sigmund Freud despised his weak father, whom he claimed was a pervert. Freud placed father hatred at the center of his psychology -- something Vitz believes expressed his unconscious hostility towards his own father.

French existentialist John Paul Sartre lost his father when he was a baby. His mother remarried when Sartre was twelve, giving him a stepfather he resented. Not long afterward Sartre concluded, "You know what? God doesn't exist."

And then we have the political atheists, whose defective relationships with their fathers ultimately affected millions. Joseph Stalin hated his father, who beat him unmercifully. "It is not difficult," Vitz writes, "to understand why communism, with its explicit rejection of God and all other higher authorities . . . had great appeal for

[Stalin]."

Adolf Hitler also received terrible beatings from his father, who died when Adolf was fourteen. And the father of China's Mao Zedong was a tyrant who taught his son "his first appreciation of revolution and rebellion in his own family setting."

America's most famous atheist, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, despised her father; her son William reports that O'Hair once tried to kill the old man with a butcher knife.

After studying these "major historical rejecters" of God, Vitz concludes that "we find a weak, dead, or abusive father in every case." Of course, no matter what our family background is, each of us is still ultimately responsible for the decisions we make. But Vitz's remarkable book shows how powerful is the role of the earthly father in shaping the child's view of the heavenly father!

I Kings 2:1-12

1 When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.

2 "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, show yourself a man,

3 and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go,

4 and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: 'If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'

5 "Now you yourself know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me-- what he did to the two commanders of Israel's armies, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle, and with that blood stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet.

6 Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace.

7 "But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom.

8 "And remember, you have with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who called down bitter curses on me the day I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the LORD: 'I will not put you to death by the sword.'

9 But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood."

10 Then David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David.

11 He had reigned forty years over Israel-- seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem.

12 So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

(NIV)

Let's see what we can learn from David the King as he gives last instructions to Solomon, his son. Note he says, "Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man." Then he gives Solomon some specific on how to be a man of God:

1. OBSERVE THE COMMANDS OF THE LORD -- VS. 3

Could a father share anything more important to his sons and daughters than to "walk in the ways of the Lord?" Fathers must model obedience to God as well as verbalize the challenge for the sons and daughters to walk in the ways of the Lord. That takes commitment and it takes time. Time with the kids when they see us doing things that please the Lord: praying, reading the Word, going to church, partaking of communion, witnessing to others, living the Christian life.

It takes time! It may call for a re-arranging of priorities. Let me share a true story:

Late in 1999, Danny Ainge abruptly relinquished his job as head coach of the Phoenix Suns. The reason he gave for his decision was that he has a wife and six children at home and that he was tired of being too much of a stranger in their lives. The NBA is likely to be there still in a few years. He knows his children won't.

"I love coaching, but anybody can coach," Ainge said. "My wife has just one husband and my children have just one father. I don't believe I'm jumping ship. I'm diving overboard to save my family." He cited a time recently when one of his teenage sons told him he was becoming too distant. "And I couldn't disagree with him," he said. A younger daughter had lamented him always being away when daddy-daughter campouts took place.

"This will make a statement to my family," said the former Boston Celtics player whose coaching record is 136-90 in just over three seasons with the Suns, "that they are more important than my career."

Bryan Colangelo, President of the Suns franchise, reacted with this: "He didn't quit. He redirected his life."

Most men and women can't quit their jobs today. They don't have the financial security of a former professional athlete. But I'm sorry for the spouse and kids of anyone whose family isn't more important than career and they truly know it.

Cynics question him. Some will never understand. Those fathers whose kids are suddenly grown and gone –fathers who wish they could play a few more games of catch or have one more tea party-- those fathers envy Danny Ainge. Are we taking time, parents, to show our kids that they are a priority? Are we leading them in the way of the Lord?

David says that if Solomon will observe God's laws and live by His Word, he can look forward to the blessing of God's prosperity ... look at verse 3, the last part: "...that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go,..."

The result of observing God's will is prosperity. Not necessarily worldly riches, but the true prosperity of a life blessed by the Creator.

Then David outlines the simple steps in observing God's laws:

2. OPPOSE EVIL AND HONOR THAT WHICH IS GOOD! -- 5-9

I am a little uncomfortable with the emphasis of David here on what seems to be telling his son to get revenge.

5 "Now you yourself know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me-- what he did to the two commanders of Israel's armies, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle, and with that blood stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet. 6 Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace. 8 "And remember, you have with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who called down bitter curses on me the day I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the LORD: 'I will not put you to death by the sword.' 9 But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood."

But it appears that these evil doers that Solomon is warned about were, indeed, guilty under the law of Moses of capital offenses. So what I see here is that Solomon is instructed to oppose that WHICH GOD CALLS EVIL. As one man has wisely said; "ALL IT TAKES FOR EVIL TO TRIUMPH IS FOR GOOD MEN TO DO NOTHING."

David is saying to Solomon: OPPOSE EVIL! Listen to these admonitions from The New Testament: *Rom 12:9 Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Rom 12:21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. 1Thes 5:22 Abstain from all appearance of evil. (KJV)*

If we really love God and love people, we will hate the sin that breaks the Father's heart and brings death to the people the Father loves.

A Christian band had a song out some time back: Love God, Hate Sin! That's pretty simplistic, but it is a basic attitude God's people cultivate.

David says in verse 7, that we should honor the Good. 7 "But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom.

David wanted to honor the goodness and the kindness of a man who stood by God's King when he fled Jerusalem in the crisis caused by Absalom. WE MUST OPPOSE EVIL AND HONOR THAT WHICH IS GOOD!

Rom 12:9 Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Rom 12:21 Be not

overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

So simple. Observe God's laws, oppose evil and honor good! But what sound advice for the son of David, the King we know as Solomon. And while every son or daughter must take personal responsibility for his or her actions, there is no doubt that fathers have a tremendous impact on the direction of spiritual direction their children take in life. Consider one more face derived from Paul Vitz's book about the impact of fathers on their children...

Every defender of the Christian faith he studied had a strong and tender bond with his father, or with a father substitute. And as adults, these men became known for taking on the intellectual forces of atheism.

For example, Blaise Pascal, the great French philosopher and mathematician, was personally tutored by his devoutly religious father. Their relationship was close and affectionate. As an adult, Pascal wrote "a powerful and imaginative defense of Christianity."

Alexis de Tocqueville, French aristocrat and author of *Democracy in America*, loved his father deeply. Tocqueville argued that religion is absolutely necessary in the public life of a nation-- a view that was, Vitz writes, "really quite unusual" at a time when atheistic views of culture "were becoming standard in Europe."

William Wilberforce is known as Britain's great Christian abolitionist, but few people know he was also a devoted dad. When his son Samuel was away at school, Wilberforce found time to write him more than 600 letters in which he poured out his love. Samuel later became a bishop who was "well-known as one of the major debaters (for God's Word) in the conflict . . . over Darwinian evolutionary theory," Vitz writes.

G.K. Chesterton, the Christian apologist, was deeply attached to his father, who was Chesterton's constant companion when he was a child.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who was executed by Hitler, also came from a loving home. His father was a major presence in the lives of his children, whom he treated with respect and affection. The great missionary to Africa, Albert Schweitzer, called his father "my dearest friend." Karl Barth, the Swiss-German theologian, also enjoyed a close relationship with his father.

In light of Vitz's research, the importance of good fathering can hardly be overstated. His study helps us understand why scripture commands fathers to provide diligent spiritual leadership to their children -- and why, in Ephesians, fathers are specifically instructed to avoid provoking their children to anger. With that in mind, let me close with this heart-touching story:

A man came home from work late again, tired and irritated, to find his 5-year-old son waiting for him at the door. "Daddy, may I ask you a question?" "Yeah, sure. What is it?" replied the father. "Daddy, how much money do you make an hour?"

"That's none of your business! What makes you ask such a thing?" the father said angrily.

"I just wanted to know. Please tell me, how much do you make an hour?" pleaded the little boy. "If you must know, I make \$20 an hour." Looking up, he said, "Daddy, may I borrow \$9 please?"

The father was furious. "If the only reason you wanted to know how much money I make is just so you can borrow some to buy a silly toy or some other nonsense, then you march yourself straight to your room and go to bed. Think about why you're being so selfish. I work long, hard hours everyday and don't have time for such childish games."

The little boy quietly went to his room and shut the door. The father sat down and started to get even madder about his little boy's questioning. How dare he ask such questions only to get some money. After an hour or so he calmed down. He started to think he might have been a little hard on his son. Maybe there was something he really needed to buy with that \$9 and he didn't ask for money very often. The father went to his son's room and opened the door. "Are you asleep, son?" he asked.

"No daddy, I'm awake," replied the boy. "I've been thinking, maybe I was too hard on you earlier," said the father. "It's been a long day and I took my aggravations out on you. Here's that \$9 you asked for." The little boy sat straight up, beaming. "Oh, thank you daddy!" he yelled.

Then, reaching under his pillow, he pulled out some more crumpled up bills. The father, seeing that the boy already had money, started to get angry again. The little boy slowly counted out his money, then looked up at his father. "Why did you want more money if you already had some?" the father grumbled.

"Because I didn't have enough, but now I do," the little boy replied. "Daddy, I have \$20 now. Can I buy an hour of your time?"

How many children today would be willing to buy the time of their father?

Will you pray with me as all who are parents and grand-parents are challenged to re-commit ourselves to devoting time and love to the children in our lives...