

Reading

Luke 15:11-32

In reading the scriptures there are multiple references to fathers which fall into three groups, celestial, terrestrial, and infernal. In the celestial and spiritual realm there is only one, that is God the Father (1 Cor. 8:6; Gal. 1:3); in the terrestrial realm there are thousands of biological and step fathers (Gen. 10:21; Matt 2:22), and in the infernal realm there is only one and that is the Devil who is the father of lies (Jn. 8:44). There were only two men who never had a biological father, Adam and the Lord. While Adam is called a Son of God, he was not a son biologically, but one who came from God (Lk. 3:38), and our Lord was conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20).

- a) Sometimes fathers can give bad examples. Such was the case with Abraham who was the “step-father” to Lot, who was his brother’s son (Gen. 12:5). There came a time when there was a famine in the land and without a word from God and being a good business man, he went down into Egypt bringing Lot with him (Gen. 12:5, 10). It was a sad trip for despite being very prosperous, in the end he lost his testimony with the Egyptians (Gen. 12:20-13:1).
- b) Then later Lot, who had been with Abraham, followed in his step-father’s steps. When a decision had to be made as to where he should go, he also being a good business man, looked at Sodom and it reminded him of the well watered plains of Egypt (Gen. 13:10) and again, without a word from God, he went down into that place. He prospered governmentally sitting in the gate (Gen. 19:1), but when the judgment came, ultimately he lost his son, sons-in-law and his wife, and ended by being the father of two children through incest (Gen. 19:12, 14, 16, 26, 36). We could say, “If only Abraham had never gone to Egypt what a man Lot could have been”.
- c) David made a sad mistake when he received back (albeit at a distance; 2 Sam. 14:21-24, 33), a son who was a rebellious ruffian and never repenting of his wickedness became a grief to David and multiple others (2 Sam. 15:2, 14).

The Prodigal’s Father

In Proverbs (ch. 31) there is given to us an illustration of an ideal wife and mother, and it seems to me that in the parable of the prodigal son we have a pictorial illustration of an ideal father. How does an ideal father care for his family?

- a) The prodigal’s father provided for his children (Lk. 15:11-12), a truth also taught in the New Testament (2 Cor. 12:14). Today we hear of absentee fathers, but such fail to understand that whither he is still with the mother or mothers of any of his children, he has a God given responsibility to provide for them. The New Testament teaches, “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8).
- b) Part of being a father are the decisions which need to be made as the child develops from childhood to adulthood. In teenage years they are beginning to “branch out”, it is a thing we all did from the time we were learning to crawl and walk. The prodigal’s father provided for the physical development of his two sons, and though they were quite different, he allowed each to make their own decisions. Virtually every child leaves the security of the family home, at first with their friends and then to courtship, marriage and eventually begin a family of their own. When consideration is of the Lord, then we observe there was a time when he was obedient to his parents and a time when He directed his mother, for no longer was he a child in the home but a young man with his own responsibility before God. As a child he lived the principle, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother” (Eph. 6:1-2). As fathers our responsibility is to, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).
- c) Fatherhood necessitates allowing our children to experience the consequences of their decision making. At this point we come to:
 - (i) His destitution: The young man wanted to be away from home to live the good life, and the father had to step aside and let him go. We are told that in time, when all that he had was spent, he was penniless and hungry. It is so tragic to read how far he had fallen for we read, “When he had

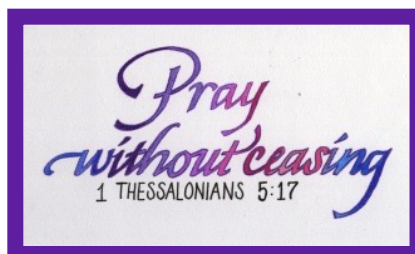
spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him” (Lk. 15:14-16). How foolish he must have felt, nobody cared about him, depressed, feeling worthless, a Jew sitting among the pigs and would have eaten the pig swill. What a lesson he was learning. There are consequences for personal decisions. Unlike today, he did not blame his father or brother, he knew that he alone was the source of his present situation.

- ii) His deliberation: He said to himself, “How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father” (Lk. 15:17-18). This young man knew the character of his father, he was such that no matter how he felt in or about himself, he could always cast himself on his father’s kindness. Sitting in the pig pen he began to reason with himself and made the first wise decision in a long time.
- iii) His declaration and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants” (Lk. 15:18-19). There was no excuses to be made, he would make a clean slate of everything (Lk. 15:17-19). He had wasted all that had been given on a sinful lifestyle (Lk. 15:30) and had sinned against his father and Heaven (Lk. 15:21).
- iv) His decision: In the darkness of his life at this time he determined to eat humble pie, “And he arose, and came to his father” (Lk. 15:20). What a father he found, longing and waiting for his foolish and wayward son to return. How touchingly beautiful for it reads, “When he (the son) was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him”. What a relief the Father had, his son who was dead was alive, his wayward son was back home.

Conclusion

The days were dark for the young man but darker still for the father. As I write this, I wonder how many fathers/mothers have wayward children, children they love and yet never a word from them. The parents and their God mean nothing to them, they know not where their children are or what they are doing. Life is lived night after night, day after day, with an emptiness no one else can fill. Often in the small hours of the night pillows are wet with tears and a parent waits longingly for a wayward child to come home. Darker still, the nights when one realizes that their child has no time for God, Christ, or His salvation, and that every second of the clock brings them nearer to an eternal Hell. One split second after they die that child will be banished in Hell, into the caverns of the damned to weep and wail for all eternity, but then there will be a different weeping and there will be relived the words of David, “And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” “But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Sam. 18:33; 19:4).

Many years ago I heard such a wailing from a mother who looked at her son in the coffin knowing she would never see him again and that he was in the horrors of Hell forever. We never read of this father praying for His son. May the Spirit of God preserve us from ever committing such a sin, and be so coldly clinical that Hell becomes simply a word in our vocabulary.



... Rowan Jennings