

## Fatherhood And Modern Temptations

Fatherhood

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Given 16-Jun-01; Sermon #507

Pornography use (specifically, Internet pornography use) is on the rise, and it is claiming a high price—lost jobs, failed marriages, and destroyed families. Worldly pastors are no less vulnerable to this addiction. The number of pastors becoming entangled in pornography on the Web is growing. In August of 1999, 11% of the calls received on the *Focus on the Family Pastoral Care Line* were about pastors and online pornography. In August of 2000, online porn worries prompted 20% of the calls.

The temptation may be old, but the technology is new. With an increasing number of computers and Internet access in each home, pornography is just a click away—as convenient as ordering flowers or sending email. In August of 2000, *Christianity Today* magazine conducted an exclusive survey of its readership—both laity and clergy—on the issue of Internet pornography. For the majority of respondents, Internet pornography is not a problem; but the response of a significant few was very revealing.

Though more than half of the respondents (67% of clergy and 64% of laity) have not visited a sexually explicit Web site, a significant number of respondents (33% of clergy and 36% of laity) say that they have. Of those who have visited sexually explicit Web sites, just over half of the clergy (i.e., 53%) say that they have visited the site a few times in the past year, compared to 44% of lay readers. A total of 18% of clergy said they visit sexually explicit Web sites between a couple times a month and more than once a week.

There is no doubt that this world's Christianity is in sad, sad shape. Some temptation comes unsolicited. Steven Lane, a former pornography producer who now has a ministry to sex addicts, says that he had friends who would build pornography Web sites, then go to religious web sites to pick up email addresses. One click on the unknown Web site link in the text of an unsolicited email, and the receiver was taken to a porn site. And apparently this has become very successful for these pornography Web sites. They actually infuse themselves into your life, and into your computers.

Today, not only are men tempted and distracted by a bombardment of enticements from the Internet, TV, and other forms of entertainment; but the amount of time and effort it takes to maintain a modest lifestyle in this society is increasing and constantly distracting we men. We find ourselves so barraged with a constant "busyness" that we neglect our wives and children. As a result, today most men are failures at fatherhood.

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Describing our day, Malachi wrote of worldwide upheaval that would take place unless the fathers turned their hearts, emotions, concerns, and intellects to their children. Mr. Armstrong emphasized this next scripture many, many times over the years.

**Malachi 4:5-6** Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD; and he shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

That word "curse" in the margin is "utter destruction." This is a desperately serious warning for all of us—not just fathers, but mothers and all family members. The end result of a father's lack of responsibility to his children is simply **devastation**. Fathers become fathers by taking up the reins of family leadership. Irrespective of modern opinions, the Bible teaches that a father is meant to be a loving authority—the head of his home, his wife, and his children.

A father's responsibility in the home is vital. It is so vital that, in the absence of a father properly fulfilling his purpose, others try to fill the vacuum. The prophet Isaiah prophesied just what would happen when fathers in any society become ineffective.

**Isaiah 3:12** "As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths."

Everything having to do with this society (including modern education) leads us, and causes us, to err in the way of family relationships. Because husbands and wives have abdicated their God-given responsibilities as leaders, guides, and the ones who set and maintain standards—wives and children fill the void. The result is that the integrity that God intended for the family unit is scattered. Respect, untaught in the home, becomes a rare commodity. And that is exactly what ever are seeing in our society today.

**Isaiah 3:5b** The child will insolent toward the elder.

Or, the child will rebel against his father and his mother. We can scarcely open a newspaper or magazine without reading of some evidence of family disruption and disintegration. More than half of all marriages now end in divorce in the United States. God lays major blame firmly on the husband and the father. Paul wrote, more than 1900

years ago, a searing catalog of the sins of modern humanity. These sins have directly affected fathers, and have destroyed and ruined families.

**II Timothy 3:2-7** For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God [And, I might add, more than lovers of their families.]; having a form of godliness, but denying its power. And from such people turn away. For of this sort are those who creep into households, and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

It is sins like these that make awful fathers and that destroy true fatherhood. This is the heritage of the children in the absence of God's laws, and in the absence of their fathers. Today, a major problem among fathers is simply not being there—not spending time with our children. Four out of ten children do not live with their fathers; and those who do, rarely see them. What a sad indictment that is to fathers in this nation. The image of the professional business man (always off on business), the workaholic (who rises early and leaves before the children are up, and then comes home after they have gone to bed), the man who spends his 'set aside time' to have a beer with the guys—these only tell part of the story.

I can relate directly to this. It was about twenty years ago. I was working very hard, long hours; and I was going to school at night. One day I came home and my wife said to me, "You know, you never spend time with your children." And I said, "Sure I do." But she said, "You haven't seen them, or talked to them, in three days." That hit me so hard, that it was at that time that I began to turn that around.

Now, unhappy wives and mothers cannot wait to leave the house for the "*fulfillment*" of pushing papers in an office somewhere, or entering data into a computer all day. So I ask you ladies, "Since when is pushing papers, or hitting plastic keys, more important than nurturing and training true future God beings (that is, our children) for the Family of God?" That is not directed at you ladies as an accusation. It is directed at us men and us fathers—because a major part of that blame goes to us.

Quite often a wife and mother feels unfulfilled at home because her husband is not fulfilling his responsibility as leader, protector, provider, and confidant. This—a wife and mother needs for security. This—a wife and mother needs for a feeling of worth, as her

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husband's other half. If the husband and father is not there with his family, he cannot teach and love them properly.

How many fathers, while not exactly committing the error of 'not being around,' come home after a hard day; invade the refrigerator, or liquor cabinet; and use the television set as a barrier between themselves and their offspring—all the while telling themselves that they are '*at home with*' their family? How many fathers bring home a briefcase full of papers, or a laptop computer, and then disappear—"not to be disturbed" and hardly seeing their children during the week, and unfortunately during the weekend as well?

Listen to this disturbing quote from Weldon Hardenbrook, the author of the book, *Missing in Action*. "Mark it well, a tuned out father consciously or subconsciously prefers to watch the six o'clock news rather than speak with his own children; he would rather eat take-out food by the glow of a rented movie on his VCR than join his wife for a candlelight dinner; he would rather lose himself in the distant world of ESPN than toss a football with his teenage son. Always self-absorbed, he would rather 'zone out' than serve the needs of his family."

What an indictment that is to all the fathers in this nation. That cuts me to the quick, as well. I am not just pointing the finger. Children emulate their parents. They cannot emulate what they cannot see. We fathers have to seek out the hearts of our children, in order for them to come to us. What is the result when fathers are not around to emulate?

**Proverbs 30:17** The eye that mocks his father [and the father takes some responsibility there], and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it.

The ravens will pluck out the eyes of the rebellious child. "Raven" is a biblical metaphor for *scavengers*. Those are scavengers that seek to pluck our children out of obeying God. Some of the most aggressive and perverted scavengers in our society today are the *homosexuals*. They are actively seeking to steal the minds of our children, as is all of this present society. If you have any doubts about that, just realize that ***the norm*** for family relationships on the major networks—every night of the week, during primetime TV viewing—is the homosexual lifestyle. It supersedes and goes far beyond the normal lifestyle, which was replaced by the single parent. And now the homosexual lifestyle has replaced the single parent, and is dominant in television.

I noticed the other day, as I was listening to public radio, they were talking about

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homosexuals—so I turned it off. Two hours later, I turned it on again; and they were talking about homosexuals, so I turned it off. Then next day, I turned it on; and they were talking about homosexuals, so I turned it off. Public radio is a very liberal radio, but it is supposed to be educational. So you can see what they are educating us with.

Today, we have a new enticement and distraction—the almighty **Internet** with its unquenchable email. Have you ever noticed how time really flies by when you are on the Internet, or working with email? I know that there have been times when I have been working with email, and I look up and realize that three hours have gone by. That has not happened lately; because, when it did happen, I determined that I was going to stop it. I am not saying it is wrong. I am just saying that I cannot handle it at home. It interferes with my family.

We sit down intending to spend a few minutes checking our email, but it goes on and on and on. What is happening is that our minds are being extracted out of our skulls—sucked into the fantasy world of electronics, re-educated and put back into our heads—with the only visible evidence of the encounter being our bloodshot eyes. It happens at work, and it happens at home. But it is tolerated much more at home by our wives and children than it ever would be by our bosses. Nevertheless, it is a problem at work.

Business experts have found that the Internet alters our moods and distracts us from our responsibilities. This is fact. This is what they have found through many, many surveys and research. According to an article entitled "Internet Misuse in the Workplace leads to Employee Discipline and Termination," by the Business Editors of *Business Wire* (January 11, 2000):

Nearly 2 out of 3 companies nationwide have disciplined—and nearly 1 out of 3 have terminated—employees for Internet misuse in the workplace, according to a new survey from Websense Inc. and the Center for Internet Studies.

Keep in mind that 'management software' is software that you can put on your computer, as a business, to screen out inappropriate Web sites—which we do have here, at the church; and I am very thankful for it. Continuing the quote.

Of those companies who use management software, most use it to block pornography. [Remember, this is at work.] Others use it to block hate groups, gambling, and chat rooms.

"The Web is a very powerful technology, capable of altering our moods and distracting

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us from our time at work," said Dr. David Greenfield, CEO, Center for Internet Studies. "Anything that can alter our moods can be abused, and the Internet is no exception in the workplace."

The same principle holds true and applies to TV and other forms of entertainment. If it alters our moods and distracts us from our responsibilities at work, then it also interferes and distracts us and alters our moods at home.

Let us take a closer look at this misuse of the Internet, and how it perverted one man's way of life. I am going to quote quite a bit from an article in the magazine, *Christianity Today* (the March 5, 2001 issue) by Christine J. Gardner. The article was entitled "Tangled in the Worst of the Web—What Internet porn did to one pastor, his wife, his ministry, their life." In listening to this, also apply the other media as well—television, radio, magazine, and on and on. But this article hits the Internet hard.

Scott was finally alone in his office. After another jam-packed day at the church, he was exhausted but pleased. His hard work was paying off. The youth group was exploding in size, and people said he deserved the credit. Before turning to the stacks of papers and phone messages that demanded his attention, Scott decided he had time for a quick reward. He shut his door and sat down at this computer, as it hummed quietly on his desk. "I deserve it," he thought. He clutched his mouse, and then—click, click, click—the images of women, posing erotically, smiled back in seeming agreement.

Keep in mind that Scott was the pastor of a major denominational church.

By all appearances, Scott, barely into his 30s, had it all. A popular and energetic youth pastor at the largest church in his denomination, Scott already was in demand as a speaker and writer all across the country. He was married to Caroline, a beautiful and loving wife, and lived in a comfortable home they shared with their baby girl. [So this man was also a father.] Yet somehow, full satisfaction eluded him. Scott—like a small but increasing number of pastors today—was living a part of his life in seductive secrecy: He had become a cybersex addict, and his thirst for Internet pornography seemed unquenchable.

"I rationalized," he said. "I made all the excuses: 'God, look at all these things I'm doing for you, working with all of these teenagers. Look, I deserve to have this . . . because I have a wife who doesn't care.'"

You will notice, as we go through this article, that he keeps saying, "I deserve it, I deserve it, I deserve it."—time, after time, after time. That was his reasoning, because of all the 'good' that he had done.

Porn was slowly taking over Scott's life. The next year, Scott moved from fantasy to reality. He had what he calls a nonsexual affair with a female lay leader in his church. He eventually broke off the relationship. Fearful of the truth coming out, Scott took a new job as the youth pastor of a small church on the Gulf Coast. But his porn use increased. [We cannot run from our sins.]

Within the year, the couple moved back to the Plains, so Scott could take a position at a large church in another denomination. Outwardly, it appeared they were moving to be near Scott's mother, who was dying of cancer. But Scott insists the real reason was pride. "At that point in my life, I was so arrogant and so prideful and so committed to the image I had of myself that we went back, because we couldn't stand being at a small church. We wanted to be in the limelight again." Scott was soon booked to speak across the country for months.

By the late 1990s, Scott's porn use had become addictive, controlling much of his time and thoughts. "I had gotten to the place where I stopped asking God to forgive me," Scott said. "I almost felt like I deserved it. [There it is again.] I would write a sermon and shut my door and pull up pornography on the Internet in my office."

Porn became the escape from his overly demanding job and troubled marriage. "It was a safe place. I was not going to be rejected. I was not going to be hurt. It was a place where I found fulfillment, where I never found fulfillment anywhere else."

Porn became Scott's easy answer for intimacy: a false feeling of acceptance without the commitment or the physical risks of catching a disease or getting someone pregnant.

After years of his chronic porn use amid deep marital problems, Scott's double lifestyle reached a crisis: About four years ago, he got caught. Scott was speaking at a large retreat for Christian youth. He felt a compulsive

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attraction to a college coed from another church. In private with her for a few moments, he touched her inappropriately. Before the retreat was over, the student told her church group what had happened. "Everything hit the fan," Scott said. "It was really ugly."

Scott went home and told his wife everything, from the retreat incident to his years of porn addiction. His wife, Caroline, though fully aware of their marital problems, was completely unaware of his porn addiction. She was devastated.

He unloaded everything from years and years of their marriage, behind the scenes, upon her all at one time—of the deep, dark secrets.

For Scott, porn use seemed to dull a very deep disappointment in his relationship with his wife and with God. He says he did not feel loved. "In my own self-centeredness, in my own wickedness, in my own evil heart, I decided that I was going to get what I wanted independent of God," he said.

Men, you may be saying, "I don't do that!" And I hope it is true. But the indications are that there are many men and fathers out there doing this. And so I am just giving a warning as to how devastating and how bad it is. But apply the same principle of **addiction** to computer games, email, TV, your favorite hobby, or anything that would distract you from your wife and children. Men, I challenge you to ask your wife, "Do I spend too much time doing things without you and the children?"

We are finished with Scott's story, but continuing with Christine Gardner's article:

Men are not the only ones vulnerable. Just under 10% of the calls about sexual addiction on Focus on the Family's Pastoral Care Line are from women, some of whom are pastors. [Of course, these are worldly churches.]

"Many female sex addicts get hooked through X-rated chat rooms. But younger women are increasingly attracted to pornographic imagery," says Glenn Robitaille, founder and president of the Barnabas Christian Counseling Network, which provides sexual addiction counseling over the Web.

While much attention is focusing on protecting children from porn, the real problem may be with adults. As many as 20 million adults visit cybersex sites

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each month, according to a study published last year in the journal, *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*.

Based on an online survey of more than 9,000 adults, the study projects that at least 200,000 of all Web porn users are 'cybersex compulsives,' spending more than 11 hours viewing Web porn each week. During January 2000, the top cybersex site had more 'unique [or, new] visitors' than [espn.com](http://espn.com), [cdnow.com](http://cdnow.com), or [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com).

Pornography is one of the most profitable ventures on the Internet. Online porn revenues increased from \$52 million in 1996 to more than \$2 billion in 1999, according to this article—*Obscene Profits: The Entrepreneurs of Pornography in the Cyber Age*.

Another study estimates cybersex sales took in \$1.4 billion in 1999, nearly the same as online book purchases (\$1.3 billion), but significantly more than online air-travel revenue (under \$800 million), according to Forrester Research.

Some in the wireless industry hope pornography and the corresponding AD rates it commands will do for that industry what pornography has done for e-commerce. New services allow owners of handheld computing devices to download erotic stories and photos.

How convenient can it get? You are walking around with your handheld cell phone, and you have a screen on there; and you can download it right from there. If you are addicted, you are going to become more addicted. (Is it possible?)

Let us leave these depressing statistics of the perversion of this world in which we live but are not part of, and look to God's Word for truth and encouragement in the area of fatherhood. If we trace the image of the father through the Bible, in general outline we see three major themes:

1. **Fatherhood as an ideal**, created for 'good' by God Himself.
2. **The failure of human fatherhood** in a world of enormous pressures. Or, in other words, men 'give in' to temptation.
3. **God as the perfect Father**, who alone can redeem the failure of human fathers.

With nearly a thousand uses of the precise vocabulary of fatherhood in English translations, the image of the father is a major biblical model throughout. And being a major biblical model and biblical theme means that it is extremely important.

The first major biblical theme of fatherhood that I mentioned is fatherhood as an ideal. The absence of detailed illustrations of fatherhood does not mean that the Bible fails to give us a memorable picture of fathers. Men we remember at least partly as fathers include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Isaac, Eli, David, Solomon, Job, and Joseph the father of Jesus. Also, unnamed fathers are important in both the Psalms and Proverbs. For a description of the ideal father we are mostly left with the commands that the Bible gives to fathers, since we do not actually have lengthy pictures of fathers who live up to those commands very thoroughly.

It is clear from the Old Testament emphasis on fathers, that fathers are the heads of families. They are clan leaders through whom Old Testament genealogies are traced, and about whom most Old Testament biographies are written. We find dozens of references to "father's house" as a way of designating the parental home, or place of origin. While righteous instruction is a joint responsibility of both parents, in the Bible it is more the domain of fathers than of mothers. We see this very clearly in the book of Proverbs as we read through it. Just to give you a few examples very quickly:

**Proverbs 1:8** My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother.

**Proverbs 4:1** Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding.

**Proverbs 6:20** My son, keep your father's commandment, and do not forsake the law of your mother.

**Proverbs 13:1** A wise son heeds his father's instruction: but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

**Proverbs 15:5** A fool despises his father's instruction: but he that receives correction is prudent.

Those are just a few of the many, many places that it talks about a father's responsibility. The psalmist writes of how "our fathers have told us" of God's past deeds

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and how important that is.

**Psalms 44:1** We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, the deeds You did in their days, in days of old.

What would have happened if the fathers had not have told them? They would not have known. God would have had to use another way.

**Psalms 78:1-3** Give ear, O my people, to my law. Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable. I will utter dark saying of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.

It is very important that the fathers instruct their children in wisdom and in the way of God. If the father is not home, he is not doing that—because he is not spending any time doing that. In his farewell discourse, Moses commanded the Israelites to remember the days of old, and ask their father, and he would show them.

**Deuteronomy 32:5-7** They [the children of Israel] have corrupted themselves, they are not His [God's] children, because of their blemish; a perverse and crooked generation. Do you thus deal with the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father who bought you? Has He not made you and established you? Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations. Ask your father [that is, your human father and your father in the faith], and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you.

God's governing of His people is on the highest moral and ethical level. But, in contrast, the Israelites acted corruptly, as Moses recorded in verse 5. That phrase, "*having corrupted themselves,*" means that, while God is always right in His handling of Israel, Israel had been wrong and devious in rejecting Him. The idolatry of the golden calf illustrates this **corruption** that broke their relationship to God so that they were no longer His children. They were 'no sons' of His. This condition of being 'no sons' was to their shame and their disgrace. Sin separates us from God. And when we are separated from God, we are 'no sons' of His.

The term "Father" (in verse 6) shows that the formation of the nation of Israel is a creative act of God. As Father, He is the progenitor and originator of the nation, and is

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also the One who has matured and sustained them throughout their existence. In verse 7, the Israelites were urged to ask for information from their fathers (their human 'fathers' and their spiritual 'fathers') and their elders. These fathers and elders would explain to them what had occurred. In God's eyes, fathers hold a unique **position of authority** that is quite foreign to most modern cultures—as we have seen for the past hundred years, actually.

But what is the great historic sin of men? It has happened time and time again. It is that men flee responsibility! Men flee *leadership* in the family. But, predating social scientists by hundreds of years, God long ago explained that a father should be neither harsh nor permissive. So, in being the leader, he has to be balanced in his approach to leadership—not a tyrant, and not a soft dishrag. Addressing Himself to fathers, God says in effect [Paraphrasing Ephesians 6:4.]: "Do not be so uncompromisingly harsh as to alienate, anger, discourage and frustrate your children; but do raise your family with discipline, instruction and guidelines, and in the recognition of God's governance of your lives."

**Proverbs 22:6 (KJV)** Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

The Jewish Publication Society translates that verse this way:

**Proverbs 22:6 (JPS)** Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old, he will not depart from it.

There is an important difference between this translation and the King James rendition of the verse, which I read just before that. The Jewish Publication Society editors correctly included the word "even," which is omitted in the King James Version. This omission causes a misunderstanding of Scripture. The Jewish translation stresses that with *right leadership* and *caring instruction* by parents in agreement, a child reared in God's way **will not** depart from it. They may stray from it for a time, but they will never completely and fully depart from it—even in their old age.

A child's obedience will mature throughout life and up through old age. But, of course, this verse cannot be used to excuse delinquent behavior during the teenage and young adult years. There is no excuse for that. We are held accountable for what we do.

The Bible also gives us a sense of the dignity and worth that God attaches to the

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father's role.

**Psalms 127:4-5** Like arrows are in the hand of a warrior; so are the children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with the enemies in the gate.

Also, the ideal for a father is to have a productive wife within his house, to have healthy children around the table, and to live to see his grandchildren.

**Psalms 128:3-6** Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. The LORD shall bless you out of Zion, and you may see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Yes, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

This is the world that has good fathers, but this is not our world. The most stable and productive societies have been those in which men and women have understood their God-ordained responsibilities and functions in the family, and have taken a moderate and balanced view of life and its responsibilities—and have acted in accordance with that, in their families. A good father takes responsibility for the spiritual welfare of his family. Job offered sacrifices on behalf of his children, and Joshua and his household served the Lord. Deuteronomy 6 portrays fathers as teachers, as does the book of Proverbs.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9** Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words, which I command you today shall be in your heart. And you [You can insert the word 'fathers' there.] shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

That sounds like in every aspect of our life we are to do these things, and to train and teach our families—especially our children. Do you have the Ten Commandments hanging in your house? It takes more than that. It takes more than just the Ten

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Commandments hanging in our house, because we tend to ignore what is hanging on our walls and walk by them. We have to teach them to our children as well.

Scan the book of Proverbs, and you will obviously find a father writing to his son. The father of Proverbs is not callously saying, "Hey, boy!" or something in an uncaring way. He is intimately saying, "My son." "My son, listen to my words." Or, "My son, I have this for you." There is *a close relationship* there. There is genuine appreciation and value of what is before the human father, and that is the son. Notice how many chapters of Proverbs begin in this way.

**Proverbs 2:1** My son, if you will receive my words, and treasure my commandments within you.

**Proverbs 3:1** My son, not do forget my law, but let your heart keep my commandments.

**Proverbs 5:1** My son, pay attention to my wisdom; lend your ear to my understanding.

What we have here, in Proverbs, is a dad crying out to his son. Of course, it is applicable to our daughters too. But the emphasis is the father-son relationship—where the caring father teaches his respectful son, so that the son will be prepared to go out and teach his family God's way of life. On a spiritual level, it is God warning His church. For example, when God inspires the psalmist to warn of the adulterous woman, He is warning us (in God's church) to avoid unfamiliar churches and unfamiliar doctrines that seduce His people with enticing knowledge, as they profess to be wise.

That was the first major biblical theme of fatherhood. The second major biblical theme of fatherhood is **the failure of human fatherhood**. Or, to make it more extensive, we could say *men give in to temptation*. We do not find many good fathers in the Bible. In fact, it is difficult to think of any biblical human father who functioned well over the course of his entire lifetime. But why do we not find many good fathers in the Bible? Fathers fail to resist a world full of innumerable temptations. Those were human fathers that are spoken of in the Bible, and we are human fathers. We all are susceptible to temptation.

Men and women respond to temptation differently. If they have a mind to resist, women **flee** temptation, while men like to crawl away slowly—hoping the temptation will

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overtake them. That could be computer games or anything else, far worse. No man sets out with the purpose in mind to *succumb* to temptation. Yet every day we hear of men—including Christian men—who fail. Unless a man remains perpetually vigilant, his own evil desires will carry him through temptation, into desire, and into sin.

According to Patrick M. Morley in his book, *What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew About Men* (copyright 1998), men generally face six types of temptations. These temptations not only interfere with a man's marriage, but they interfere with his fatherhood as well. So let me just give you those six types of temptations.

The first one is ***emotional neglect***. This is where we men are most tempted not to give our wives the thing they desire the most—emotional connection and intimacy. This is our sharing of ourselves at the deepest level possible—with our feelings, and our emotions, and our wants, and our desires. The Bible gives no similar instructions to wives (that wives should love their husbands) because it is the husbands that have the problems, loving their wives. Women seem naturally to have that ability of emotion and also more along the line of love towards their husbands. Of course, you cannot have proper love without the keeping of the commandments. And, for men, *love* must be learned; and *attention* must be learned; and *interest* must be learned. It has to be something that is pushed and worked on very hard.

The second one that Mr. Morley mentions is ***lust***. Men become sexually stimulated visually. When a man looks, that does not mean he no longer loves his wife. He is engaged in temptation—physical and spiritual. We live in a sexually over-stimulated culture, in which many men are drained of the *spiritual energy* needed to expose and to resist temptation and *the moral energy* that it takes to do both. The best way to resist sexual temptation is to flee from it. Temptation is not sin. It is when temptation is allowed to become a desire.

**I John 2:12-17** I write to you, little children [or you could say, innocent members of God's church], because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I write to you, fathers [or you could also say, on a spiritual level, mature members of God's church], because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men [or you might say, inexperienced but enthusiastic members of God's church], because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one. Love not the world or the things that are in the

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world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he that does the will of God abides forever. [And it is the will of God that we overcome temptation and sin.]

The third type of temptation is **false gods**. You can have only one god, but most men try to worship an idol and God. Idolatry is the error of giving too much time, giving worship or reverence, to any power or object other than God. It is either going to be God or something else. And whatever the something else is, it will never satisfy. It may seem like it satisfies immediately, but long term it does not. Neither physical accomplishments, nor money, nor pleasure, nor possessions, nor power, nor prestige will ultimately satisfy.

The fourth type of temptation that Mr. Morley mentions in his book is **money and debt**. Men find money more intoxicating than women find it, for the most part. Jesus named money as His chief competitor when He said:

**Matthew 6:24** No one can serve two masters. . . . You cannot serve God and mammon [money].

Not only is man tempted to earn more money, but also to borrow more money than he can afford to repay. We see that to the nth degree in this nation today. The temptation for a Christian is not to love God or money. The temptation is to try to love them both. That is, both God and money; and it does not work. To live debt-free within our means, with God the Father and Jesus Christ as the God of our lives, should be the goal of every Christian.

The fifth type of temptation is **whining**. We Israelites are very well known for complaining and whining; and I guess we men Israelites excel in it. The Bible tells of people who grumbled about the sufficiency of God's care. When men see others advancing more rapidly, frequently resentments, jealousies, envy, and bitterness build up. Partiality—perceived or real—grind on a man's ego. The way to overcome the temptation to complain is to accept our lot in life and to get on with a positive outlook on our situation.

**Philippians 4:11-12** Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full

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and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

We have no right to complain because whatever our lot in life is, that is the lot that God has given us; and it is the way that God is working with us in our lives. But our families do have a right to complain to us, as fathers, if we neglect them. That is, if we do not give them enough attention, and time, and teaching.

The sixth kind of temptation is **pride**. Stubborn pride often keeps a man from humbling himself and admitting he is wrong. Temptation to pride comes in many, many disguises. The most common form is for a man to look down with disdain on others. It is a sin of comparison in which a man compares his perceived strength with another's weaknesses. Equally insidious is the temptation for a man to look up in disgust to others who have it better, or who have accomplished more. Pride can even cause some men to feel they are above talking about "touchy feelings" and so on; and they emotionally neglect their wives, because of that pride.

**Proverbs 11:2** When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom.

If a man is too prideful to admit that he is not doing his part as a husband, if a father is too prideful to admit that he is not fulfilling his responsibility as a father, then he will bring shame to his family. But he will bring wisdom, if he is lowly and if he is humble.

Adam was the physical father of the human race. The legacy he left his children is original sin. One result of the unhappy inheritance is that most biblical fathers are failures. So, it has happened from the beginning—from Adam all the way down to the last father born. David is a prime illustration of *an inattentive father* who refused to protect his daughter, Tamar; to discipline his son, Amnon; or to be completely reconciled to his other son, Absalom. He was "a man after God's own heart," but as a father he was a miserable failure many times.

Some fathers love not 'wisely' but 'too well,' so to speak. Abraham favored Isaac over Ishmael. Isaac, in turn, doted on Esau rather than Jacob. When Isaac became the stooge in Jacob's scheme to steal the birthright, he got as much as he deserved. Jacob repeated the sin of his father by loving Joseph more than all his other sons. His favoritism brought envy, hatred, treachery, and bereavement to the entire family. And that same sin went all the way down through the generations.

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Eli's fatherhood produced sons who scandalized both the Israelites and God Himself, because he loved his sons more than he loved God; and their deaths were a scolding to him, for his sin as well as theirs. David ruled over a family broken by incest and fratricide. If only he had disciplined Adonijah as strenuously as he later grieved for Absalom, then he would have been a much better father.

**I Kings 1:5** Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king"; and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.

So you kind of have the image like in some movies where Caesar is coming down a procession in the city of Rome; and there is a whole legion—or fifty men—proceeding before him. Adonijah was, obviously, making it a big 'to-do' and a big procession. So, vanity was definitely one of his characteristics.

**I Kings 1:6** (And his father [David] had not rebuked him at any time [And you can take that to mean 'at any time in his entire life.'] by saying, "Why have you done so?" [So, apparently, David never called his son, Adonijah, into account for his actions. He never taught his son responsibility.] And he [Adonijah] was also a very good looking. His mother had borne him after Absalom.)

Other fathers failed to protect their children from worldly influences. Although Lot took his daughters out of Sodom, he did so too late to keep the impulse toward sexual perversion from them—as you remember, when they committed that perverse act with their father. Lot could not see what the society was doing to his family, and his family suffered the consequences.

The apostle Paul's exhortation to fathers not to "provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" hints at the spectacle of the tyrannical father. Perhaps the clearest biblical example of the exasperating tyrannical father was King Saul, whose volatile temper frightens his children, his best friends, and his children's best friends.

Inept bumbling fathers are found in the Bible as well, in which they seem incapable of any better response than passive anger while events transpire that are contrary to their will. So, basically, it is the father keeping his mouth shut, even though he may be stewing inside, when there is sin involved. Abraham's dismay at sending Hagar away

with Ishmael, whom he had sired in a bad decision, is one example. Jacob's disapproval of events surrounding the rape of Dinah and the revenge that his sons exacted for it is another example. And David's anger regarding his son's rape of his daughter, Tamar, is another one. The examples go on and on and on, because these were human fathers—just like the human fathers today.

Other bumbling fathers were easily *deceived* by their children. Lot is one example. Isaac and Jacob were other prime examples. Noah became a shameful spectacle to his sons as he laid naked in his tent in a drunken stupor. Father, after father, after father in the Bible were poor fathers at times. Samson's father allowed Samson to order him around—as though he was the child, rather than the parent.

**Judges 14:1-3** Now Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. So he went up, and told his father and his mother, saying, "I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife. [Remember, he is speaking to his parents.] Then his father and his mother said to him, "Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people [So, apparently, this was a common trait of Samson—that he did not bother looking among the Israelites. He kept wandering to the strange 'god,' so to speak.], that you must go to get a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" And Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well."

There was a definite father-son problem there. His father had lost control of his son far earlier than this. But against this backdrop of the failure of fathers stands the image of God the Father, who exemplifies all those characteristics that the flesh-and-blood fathers lack (such as Samson's father)—patience, kindness, firmness, attention, and a willingness to uphold a standard of righteousness. In fact, our intense disgust with the failures of fathers stems from our intuitive understanding of what a true father should be. It makes us fathers feel inadequate that we are not better fathers. But the negative character type of human fathers inevitably brings with it, as an underlying benefit, the positive incentive to change and develop good fatherly character. That is, to overcome.

That brings us to the third major biblical theme of fatherhood, which is **God as the perfect Father**. The repetitive biblical accounts of paternal failure serve as a reminder that only one 'father' is good. That is, God the Father. No matter how the patriarchs may have felt about their fathers, each came to understand that the God of their fathers could be trusted. Many times, they understood this by the fact that their fathers taught

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them this. They taught them this through their writings and through their verbal teachings.

Malachi 2 tells us that we have one trusted 'father' in common with each other. So, why do we cheat each other? He also gives specific instruction to men not to cheat on their wives through the use of unsanctioned divorce. God speaks of the man dealing treacherously with his brother, and also with his wife. That profanes the covenant that the Israelites had with God, and with their fathers. He also explains how Judah dealt treacherously, as well; and that it was an abomination that was committed in Israel. The reason that it was an abomination was that Judah strayed after strange gods.

**Malachi 2:11b** Judah has profaned the LORD'S holy institution which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.

**Malachi 2:15b** He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

*"Dealing treacherously with the wife of his youth"* also affects, very dramatically, any children involved as well. And God is saying that, for this to happen—either on a physical scale in a family, or on a spiritual scale in the church (where we seek after other gods, or other doctrines—that it *profanes* the holiness of the Lord. It is that serious! So, either way (physically or spiritually) it is a very, very serious act to deal treacherously or to commit adultery (spiritually or physically).

God is a trustworthy 'father,' and His spiritual children will follow His example. So also must a good human father be trustworthy, so his children will follow his example. Psalms 103:13 tells us that God is **a loving father** who has compassion on all His children. Moses recorded, in Deuteronomy, that God created us and carries us in His arms. Matthew writes that He provides what we need, and He gives us good gifts. And John says that He offers us true bread.

Jesus calls God "Father," especially in the gospel of John. There is great encouragement in Jesus Christ's relationship with His Father, because through this Father-Son relationship we can see our potential relationship with God. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. He is 'one' with the Father. He has inner knowledge of the Father. Jesus has seen the Father, and shares the Father's glory. Jesus shows us what kind of a heavenly Father we have. He teaches us to go to our Father for everything we need. We can call God, **"Abba, Father,"** because—by the Spirit—we are *sons* by

adoption.

**Romans 8:14-17** For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God. And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.

So by Jesus Christ's relationship with His Father, we can also have that hope—that we will have a similar relationship with the Father. In I John 3, the apostle John reminds us of the grace of God we have received through the abundance of God's own love. Such grace and love are missing from the world. Love is of no concern to them. They fail to recognize God's love, and feel no obligation to reciprocate it. But apart from love there would have been no 'children of God.'

**I John 3:1-3** Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now are we the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The relationship between God the Father and God the Son is the perfect pattern for father-son and father-daughter relationships. I threw "father-daughter" in there because I do not want to exclude the daughters. The relationship between a father and son is very similar to the one that should be between a father and a daughter.

God the Father takes justifiable pride in His Son Jesus Christ's activities. He loves His Son and is well pleased with Him. For His part, the Son submits to the will of the Father in all things. For human fathers, successful fathering comes as a result of obedient sonship—first in obedience to our human fathers in our youth, and then in obedience to God the Father in our adulthood. To be a good father is to be like God the Father.

**Matthew 5:44-48** [Christ is speaking.] "But I say to you, 'Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you; that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the

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good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

The Greek word for "perfect" in verse 48 is *teleios*. The Old Testament equivalent of this word refers to thorough commitment to God, and therefore *uprightness*. The Greek word can be rendered *mature* or *full-grown*, and in some translations the word *blameless* is used. Leviticus 19:2 has the same form in its wording as does Matthew 5:48. It says:

**Leviticus 19:2** Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: "You shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy."

God is not the Father of all men, but the Father of Jesus and the Father of Jesus' disciples. Just as in the Old Testament it was the distinctive mark of Israel that they were *set apart* for God to reflect His character—that is, His fatherly and godly character—so also the church carries on this distinctiveness as the true focus. That is, of the true Family and the true character of God the Father. That is what we should be aiming for. This is what we are trying to achieve by our overcoming of sin.

The images that emerge from the biographies of the patriarchs in Genesis can serve as a summary of how the Bible portrays **fathers**. The patriarchs are obviously progenitors of a line of descendants. As such, they are agents of blessing—not only in the blessing they pronounce on their sons, but as "fathers of the faithful" as well.

These fathers were heads of their clans and overseers of the finances of their families. When negotiations with outside parties were required, the proverbial "buck stops here" for the father was the norm or the standard for the Bible—for God's Way. At their best, these fathers were **spiritual paragons**—building altars, obeying messages from God, insuring that their sons marry well, and even showing a willingness to sacrifice a promised son in an act of supreme obedience to God. And that is the key—obedience. There is the key to successful fatherhood—supreme obedience to God!

When these patriarchs and the fathers of the Bible were *obedient to God*, they were exemplary fathers. But Genesis also gives us an analysis of how fathers fail. The practice of dishonesty and expediency in a father (for example, Abraham—who called Sarah his sister, as described in Genesis 12) is imitated by his son (Isaac, who called

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Rebekah his sister, as described in Genesis 26). Whatever the father does, his son has a better chance of doing as well—whether good or bad. So what do we fathers want our sons to do? We want them to do good. So we must as well.

Fathers stand ineffectually wringing their hands, or boiling with anger, as they watch the wreckage of their children's lives, or the wrangling of their wives. Fathers display favoritism toward children with tragic results—throughout the entire Bible. But overshadowing everything is the image of a heavenly Father who deals with His human children as human fathers were created to do.

In short, fathers in the Bible are a paradigm of the human condition. Their behavior ranges from a very good to a very bad father. Yet God does not give up on them; and, by divine grace, they even manage to make a mark for good—in the world and in their families—even with all of the sin in their lives. By their overcoming, they were able to make positive marks—in both their families and the world.

It is not easy being a father, and it was never intended to be. Not at all. Today, some fathers are widowed; and many are divorced. Some fathers are looking forward to future children. Some have children still at home, and some have grown children. And still others have grandchildren. Some men have never had children of their own. Whoever the man may be, every man is a father in his responsibility to look out for the children of this world. When we sin—as men, or as fathers, or both—we affect the children in the entire world, and very definitely and specifically our own children. ***We are our brother's keepers***, and that certainly includes our brother's children.

The essence of fatherhood is found in Matthew 22:37-39—very well known scriptures. And I am going to conclude by just paraphrasing these three verses: "Jesus said to the human father, You shall love and obey the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. You shall love your children and your whole family as yourself."

Well, fathers, have a good Father's Day tomorrow. Spend time with your family. Enjoy them. Teach them God's way of life. And you will be a wonderful and exemplary father—as many of these patriarchs ended up being, despite their shortcomings.