

The Best Father in the World

by Lance Shilton

THE BEST FATHER IN THE WORLD

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"THE BEST FATHER IN THE WORLD"

Many of us would be proud to receive the award of "The Father of the Year", but few of us would consider ourselves to be the best Father in the world - only One could claim that title - God Himself.

What do we mean by the Fatherhood of God? It is so easy to say, "Our Father which art in Heaven" without really thinking about it, but we must have some idea what we mean. Is it of some benevolent old gentleman who lets us do what we like? Then we have lost sight of God's justice.

Is it of some severe disciplinarian snooping around trying to find out if we are doing anything wrong and then punishing us? Then we have lost sight of His love.

Is it some person remote from this earth (somewhere above the bright blue sky), who does not care what happens to us? Then we have lost sight of His nearness.

The Christian revelation of God is supremely that of Father. That was Christ's most common designation for God. The New Testament Scriptures tell us three things about the Fatherhood of God:

(1) GOD is the FATHER OF CREATION:

We state this every time we say the Creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth..."

(2) GOD is the FATHER OF CHRIST:- the only begotten Son of God.

At Christ's Baptism and at His Transfiguration came the words of God, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased". At the time of the Crucifixion Jesus prayed for those who nailed Him on the Cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do".

(3) GOD is the FATHER OF ALL TRUE CHRISTIANS:

The Apostle John wrote, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the Sons of God" - and we really are! God is the best Father in the world.

It is against this background of the ideal fatherhood that

each one of us becomes conscious of our failures. One of the best-known stories in the world, told by the best teller of stories, is called the story of the Prodigal Son. I came across a modern version of the old account entitled, 'The Prodigal Father'. It went like this -

"A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of thy time and companionship and thy counsel that falleth to me!'

And he divided unto him his living, in that he paid the boy's bills, sent him to a select school, and to dancing schools, and to college, and tried to believe that he was doing his full duty by the boy.

And not many days after, the father gathered all his interests and aspirations and ambitions and took his journey into a far country, into a line of stocks and bonds and securities and other things which do not interest a boy, and there he wasted the precious opportunity of being a friend to his own son.

And when he had spent the very best of his life, and had gained money, but had failed to find satisfaction, there arose a mighty famine in his heart, and he began to be in want of real companionship and sympathy.

And he went and joined himself to one of the clubs of that country, and they elected him chairman of the house committee and president of the club, and no man gave unto him any real friendship.

But when he came to himself he said, "How many men of my acquaintance have boys whom they understand, and who understand them, who talk about their boys and seem perfectly happy in the comradeship of their sons, and I perish with heart hunger! I will arise and go to my son and say to him; Son, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight; I am no more worthy to be called thy father; make me as one of thy acquaintances."

And he arose and came to his son. But while he was yet far off, his son saw him and was moved with astonishment, and instead of running and falling on his neck, he drew back, ill at ease.

And the father said unto him, 'Son, I have sinned against

heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy father. Forgive me now, and let me be your friend.'

But the son said, 'Not so; I wish it were possible, but it is too late. There was a time when I wanted to know things, when I wanted companionship and counsel; but you were too busy. I got the information, and I got the companionship; but I got the wrong kind. Now, alas, I am wrecked in body and in soul, and there is nothing you can do for me. It is too late! Too late! Too late!'"

That is a description of one kind of Prodigal Father. Here is another.

In everything that is important in life the father will be careful in exercising the right influence, watchful from the earliest years, lest a wrong impression be made upon his child. He will try to guide his child to choose correctly, encourage him to pay attention at school, to make the right kind of friends, and to take a healthy interest in life. But when it comes to Church or Sunday School he says, "I'm leaving him to make up his own mind about religion. There's plenty of time for him to decide when he is older."

How can a father who is so careful in guiding his children in everything else, be content to ignore his responsibilities in spiritual things and push his children out into the world with little or no spiritual preparation? How can the child possibly choose correctly for himself in the future if he has been given no spiritual guidance at all? It is like a person saying he would not go in swimming until he could swim. Or if his child is sick, he lets him make up his own mind as to whether or not he will go to the doctor, or to go to school for education, or to wash behind his ears for cleanliness, or to go to bed at a reasonable hour.

Of course, such an irrational attitude would never be held by the father who has first come to his own Heavenly Father through trust in Jesus Christ. When the transforming grace of Christ has touched his life, it becomes to him his most precious experience and he wants more than anything else to pass it on to those he loves.

"Christian parents are bewildered today by many problems that

did not face their parents," said Mrs. Coggan, the wife of the present Archbishop of York. She went on to say that amongst them is the greater freedom allowed to adolescents in the matter of money, careers, sex, the pressures from without of television, radio, and glossy magazines, the insecurity caused by two World Wars and present international tensions, and the vast opportunities for higher education with the strain of not making the grade.

Any decent parent today wants to know how he can train his child morally. There may be some dispute in this community as to whether juvenile crime had risen by as much as 41%, as stated through the Attorney General's department in South Australia recently, but there is no doubt that it is on the increase. The Adelaide Juvenile Court Magistrate said, "My view is that we are facing crime indulged in for kicks and prestige."

The example and the personal opinions expressed by parents are most influential. All kinds of social problems ought to be discussed openly and freely in the home.

Take the matter of gambling, for example, which is exerting an increasing influence in our community. Previously a young person would need to go out of his way to find the facilities for gambling, but now they are legalized and available at almost every street corner, and printed in every newspaper. How important it is, therefore, that a child be guided concerning right and wrong; that the spirit of covetousness, and of wastefulness should not be allowed automatically to develop simply because he has learned no other way.

Yet, it is not so much what we say about these things, but what we do. This also applies in the matter of strong drink. Some may be able to hold their drink, but how do they know that their children are not potential alcoholics? Of course, this has always been a problem.

I was interested and somewhat amused to read in the excellent reproduction of the "London Gazette" of 1768, issued in "The News" to commemorate Captain Cook's voyage, this paragraph. It is a comment on a family service of 200 years ago. It read,

"Lord & Lady Corrington and the Marquis of Thaneshbury were among those noted people who attended St. Caspian's Church on Sunday

last. The Rev. Thomas Scott delivered a fine and most eloquent sermon on the evils of drink and the manner in which it destroys both soul and body. The congregation left the Church with their spirits much refreshed! At least, that is one way of putting it.

To train our children morally is, of necessity, linked with how we train our children spiritually.

It is not sufficient to say, "All you need to do is to keep the Ten Commandments", or, "to follow the Golden Rule", or, "to use the Sermon on the Mount as a guide", because we all know by personal experience that, as hard as we might try to do these things, we constantly fail. Our children need to know, as we need to recognise ourselves, that Christ can meet our deepest need and that He is the Saviour of all. And on this personal basis of accepting what He has done upon the Cross of Calvary for us, the whole spiritual life may be built.

Prayer becomes real, because it is prayer to a Living Person.

Bible Reading becomes interesting, because it is a Book about the One who can meet our deepest needs, and whom we know personally.

Church attendance becomes a joy, because we meet with fellow-believers and become strengthened to serve God, not only in our family, but also in our community.

But as well as the right relationship between parents and children, there also needs to be a right relationship between husband and wife.

"You're a model husband", said a wife to her husband. He was elated until he chanced to notice that the dictionary defined the word 'model' as a 'small imitation of the real thing'.

There should be a deepening of the relationship as the years go on. When a person says to me, "I look back to my Wedding Day as the happiest day of my life", I feel like saying, "What's gone wrong with your marriage?" You shouldn't look back to your Wedding Day as the happiest day of your life. It was a special day, with special significance, of course, but the happiest day

of anyone's married life should be today, because there should be a constant deepening of love for each other and a closer walk together.

I have officiated at the Marriage Service of hundreds of couples, and every time I come to the words of the Blessing at the end of the Service I am struck by the solemnity of the prayer to Almighty God that He might, "Pour upon you the riches of His grace, sanctify and bless you, that ye may please him in body and soul, and live together in holy love unto your lives' end."

The tragedy today is that more and more marriages are 'breaking up' with all the consequent problems for children. God has been either left out altogether or given a 3rd, 4th, 5th, or 6th place.

When God is left out, how are deep problems of adjustment dealt with?

When God is left out, how is the problem of not being able to have children dealt with?

When God is left out, how is the problem of difference in intellectual capacity dealt with?

When God is left out, how is the problem of the absorbing business life of the husband and the dull routine of the wife's housework dealt with?

When God is left out, how is the problem of sexual incompatibility dealt with?

A few carry on as best they can for the sake of the children or for the sake of appearance. Others end up in separation or divorce.

But whether we are married or single, parent or child, whatever our need might be, great or small, conscious or unconscious, our Heavenly Father, the best Father in the world, in all His love and compassion awaits for our return to Him.

Like the Prodigal Son we have asserted our self-will and

gone our own way to the far country of our own desires. We have separated ourselves from the influence of our Heavenly Father. We have experienced the spiritual destitution of our deliberate choosing. Our souls have become famished. We have come to a position of self-abasement, identifying ourselves with the slime and slop of this world's dregs. We have known what it is to be starving spiritually. Perhaps I am speaking to some who are only too aware that that is their condition right now.

Billy Graham asks, "What is the result of sin in our lives? Emptiness in this life - no peace, no joy. And what about the future life? Your body dies and your soul lives on, but your soul is lost. It goes out into the future, separated from God. And it ends up in the place that Jesus calls 'hell'. That's the destiny of men and women outside of Christ. So here you are - lost, a slave to sin, with no deep joy, peace and happiness in your life, with nothing to look forward to but death and hell."

Like the Prodigal Son, I wonder are we ready to stop and think and have a good look at ourselves. Luke records in Chapter 15 Verse 17 of the wayward son, "He came unto himself." We need to see ourselves as we really are. Are we afraid to look into the mirror of God's Word, the Bible, and see an exact image of ourselves? The Prodigal Son realised his true position and got up out of his pig-pen. He came in repentance back to his father with the words, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee and am no more worthy to be called thy son." He did not stay where he was and feel sorry for himself. He turned his feet to go back home. Then came that wonderful moment of reconciliation. As he ran towards his father he said, "Make me one of your servants, one of your slaves. I am not worthy to be your son." But it was a time of rejoicing as the father called to the servants, "Fill the bath, open the wardrobe, cook the dinner, turn on the music. My son who was lost has returned."

When you come to God, your Heavenly Father, you will not be a servant. You will be a son. He does not only forgive you, He does more - He makes you His son, by adoption.

St. Paul put it this way - "For all who are moved by the Spirit of God are sons of God. The spirit you have received is

not a spirit of slavery leading you back to a life of fear, but a Spirit that makes us sons, enabling us to cry 'Abba, Father!'" (Romans 8: 14, 15 NEB)

Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

How did Christ make that way open to the Father? By His death on the Cross. On the Cross Jesus Christ took your sins, your death and your judgment, and your hell. Through Christ God the Father loves you and is willing to forgive you and receive you. Are you ready to receive Him? Here is the promise of Scripture -

"As many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name" (John 1:12)

There are three simple steps to take -

+ Admit your need because of sin

"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)

+ Believe in God's Word concerning Christ

"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19)

+ Come to Christ just as you are

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life:
No man cometh unto the Father but by Me" (John 14:6)

A PRAYER:

"Just as I am without one plea,
But that Thy Blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come."

Here are three study books on Christian Parenthood that will enable fathers (and mothers too) to fulfil their God-given responsibility towards their children and fellow parents:

1. PARENTS AND CHILDREN (SB 25-90c)

A most helpful guide to Christian parents who are seeking to bring up children in God's way.

2. PARENTS AND ADOLESCENTS (SB26-90c)

Parents of adolescent children need special wisdom to fulfil their Christian responsibilities to them. These studies will prove a valuable source of that wisdom.

3. PARENTS AND ADULTS (SB 27-50c)

Based on Keith Miller's book, "The Taste of New Wine", these studies present the Christian pattern for an adult's relationship with his or her spouse, fellow-workers, and adults in general.

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THE BEST FATHER IN THE WORLD

In his best moments, a father will aspire to be a strong, loving head of the house, and set an example of integrity, leadership and maturity for his offspring. But in Australia, there is often a big gap between this ideal and real life. Lance Shilton draws our attention to the greatest and best Father of all - God Almighty. In knowing and following Him, fathers can find their fulfilment.

Recommended price 10c

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