

# A Heart to Heart Talk With Fathers

By: Jim Hohnberger

In the closing chapter of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi speaks of a special work the Lord will do just before His return: "He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers." Malachi 4:6.

If I could paint two pictures, in the first I would illustrate that which depicts the fathers in Christianity today, and in the second I would illustrate that which God is calling Christian fathers to become.

In the first picture I would paint a man with his hand reaching out to the world, while his other hand is slightly extended to his family. This man is a symbol of three classes of fathers in Christianity today.

In the first class are those fathers that are actively reaching out to the world with the many facets of the Scriptures, but who have neglected the practical day-to-day work of being a high

priest in their own homes. They have in essence placed their ministry for the world before their work in their own home mission field. While conscientious in their ministries, they have, as did priest Eli of the Old Testament, neglected their first work - that of commanding their own households after the way of the Lord, that by a well-ordered, well-disciplined, Christ-centered family, they could present to the world, the practical influence of the gospel in their family.

The second class of fathers in our first picture can be seen in the light of the parable of the Rich Young Ruler. This man chose his riches in preference to Jesus. These men in general have placed their careers in priority above the true heartfelt needs of their families. The young ruler looked upon Christ with admiration, and his heart was even drawn toward the Saviour. But he was not ready to accept the Saviour's principle of self-sacrifice. So today, many ca-

reer-minded men are drawn to their families but they choose their worldly career, while the practical spirituality of their families and their responsibilities as high priest are left unattended. Men in this class would do well to mind the words in I Corinthians 6:19: "Ye are not your own," for your family has a claim on you.

In the third class of fathers are those that are simply indifferent to the real spiritual needs of their little flock. They lose themselves in their sports, news, reading material, self-interests, or in a life of ease and a freedom from their paternal responsibilities as high priest of their homes. To me, Esau best represents this class of fathers. Esau loved self-gratification and centered his interests in the present. He delighted in the wild freedom of his sport; and for a dish of pottage he parted with his birthright. How many fathers today are carelessly bartering the glorious spiritual heritage of their sons and daughters for some miscalled freedom, indulgence, or temporary pleasure? As Esau awoke to see the folly of his rash exchange when it was too late to recover his loss, I pray it will not be too late when those fathers who have bartered the heirship of their families for selfish gratifications, awake to their folly.

Let us now look at the second picture. In it I would paint a scene of a father with one hand securely and resolutely embracing his wife and children, while his other hand, as well as the hands of his family are fully extended to a world starving for a gospel that has power to transform lives. His is truly an all-encompassing work and carries far-reaching influence as stated by Ellen White in *Adventist Home* p.32:

"One well-ordered, well-disciplined family tells more in behalf of Christianity than all the sermons that can be preached. Such a family gives evidence that the parents have been successful in following God's directions, and that their children will serve Him in the church. Their influence grows; for as they impart, they receive to impart again. The father and mother find helpers in their children, who give to others the in-

struction received in the home. The whole family is engaged in the service of the Master; and by their godly example, others are inspired to be faithful and true to God in dealing with His flock, His beautiful flock.

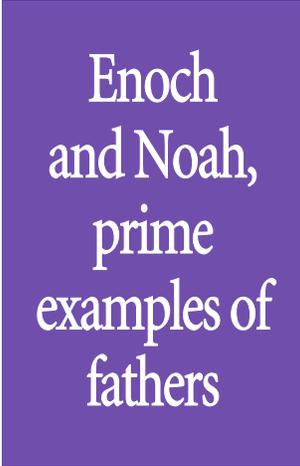
"The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well-ordered, well-disciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can, for it is a living witness of its practical power upon the heart."

Enoch and Noah would be prime examples of fathers that not only put their arms around their families but give a warning message to a world about to perish in sin.

In this writer's opinion, before the church can finish the work in the world, it will first have to do the work in its own homes. However, to date, the fathers have barely begun to touch their work at home even with the tips of their fingers. If we will first demonstrate to the world a gospel by which fathers, mothers, and children are all well-ordered, well-disciplined, as well as surrendered in thought, word and deed to Christ, there will be found the gospel that has power to change the world!

To you, fathers, who find yourselves in the first illustration, whether you be ordained ministers or lay preachers, it may well be said that the greatest sin to be accounted against you, is that your preaching was in theories and doctrines of truth, while your lives and those of your families were not "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." I Corinthians 2:4.

There are many even among those who teach the truth to others who will not receive the seal of God in their foreheads. They have the light of truth, they know their Master's will, they understand every point of the faith, but they do not have corresponding works. These who are so familiar with prophecy and the treasures of divine wisdom should act their faith. They should command their households after them, that by a well-ordered family they might present



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You see, preaching is the least self-sacrificing part of the ministry and our labors will not be acceptable to God without well-directed personal labor; not only in the homes of others, but in our own homes as well. (See 1 Timothy 5:8)

God had called Moses to lead His people out of bondage. Moses had 40 years of special training to prepare him for his work! But on his way to Egypt, Moses received a startling and terrible warning of the Lord's displeasure. An angel appeared to him in a threatening manner, as if he would immediately destroy him. No explanation was given; but Moses remembered that he had disregarded one of God's requirements; yielding to the persuasion of his wife, he had neglected to perform the rite of circumcision upon their youngest son. He had failed to comply with the condition by which his child could be entitled to the blessings of God's covenant with Israel. While living in neglect of a known duty, he would not be secure; for he could not be shielded by the angels of God.

Fathers, we must ask ourselves, Are we living in neglect of any know duty while laboring in a ministry for God? How are our children? Do they have any of the character traits of Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas? Have we failed in any way to command our households after the God of Abraham? Are our children given to foolishness? Do they grumble and fuss at the least entreaty or correction? Are we then able to go out to do the Lord's work if our homes are in neglect? If we do, the work will not be a "demonstration of the Spirit and of power," and will we not lack the shielding of the angels of God?

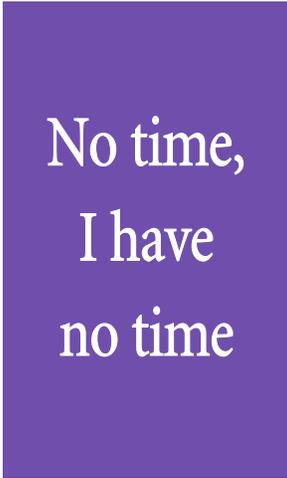
To the fathers who have placed their careers before their families I would say that we are too easily satisfied with our attainments. We feel rich and increased with goods and know not that we are 'wretched, and miserable, and poor,

and blind, and naked.' Now is the time to heed the admonition of the True Witness: ' I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.'" Revelation 3:17-18.

Eight years ago God began to open the eyes of this writer and impressed him to sell his prospering business, his country home and property and move to a quiet mountain setting to take up his first work. This writer can say it has been most demanding, most progressive, and self-denying; yet at the same time it has been the most rewarding work he has ever entered upon. To have a wife and two sons that truly know and serve God, who are not easily given to foolishness or temper, who find joy in serving others and who are increasing in Christian character daily, is a wealth that is more precious than fine gold. As I have been willing to co-operate with God in addressing my first work, God has provided well for the needs of my family, blessing me with a home business, as well as an effective outreach to the world.

Fathers, let us never utter the words: "No time, I have no time to give to the training of my family." Then we should not have taken upon ourselves the responsibility of a family. If we have children, then we have a work to do, in union with the mother and Jesus Christ in the formation of their characters for the heavenly kingdom. May we all heed the words found in Luke 11:42: "These ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

The result of the indifference in the third set of fathers is well portrayed in Ecclesiastes 10:18: "By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through." Too many fathers think they can sacrifice their responsibility as priest of their homes, for a time, without becoming entirely reckless. But in this they only deceive themselves.



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A very close friend of mine and I felt impressed to take three days separate from our families and spend them together in fasting, prayer and in the study of God's Word. We were both quite anxious to know at the outset what great things God would reveal to us. At the end of the three days God overwhelmingly impressed us to go home to serve and meet the practical and spiritual needs of our families as never before. God showed us that now is the time to do this work - and that there would never be a more convenient season. Today is the day of salvation but tomorrow, as we know, never comes. Let us heed the words of Christ to His well-intentioned disciples, who tried to withhold the children from Him so He could do a more important work: "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me." Matthew 19:14. May these words of Christ become our actions.

As I view my past, I have come to see that I was a blend of all three categories of fathers. I have come to see, as my mother rightly taught me - that it is easier to clean up your neighbor's backyard than your own. I have also come to see that it is easier to earn a six-digit income, then it is to face the mirror image of yourself in your own children; not to mention the ease of following your own selfish interests, leaving your wife to attempt to carry the burden of both father and mother.

I liken the role of the father in the second picture to the time my eldest son and I climbed our first major peak together. We rose very early in the morning and drove to the head of a mountain lake, then canoed seven miles to the base of Rainbow Peak. There we began our arduous trek to the 10,000-foot summit. Many times I thought of turning back as my muscles became sore, my body tired, and my lungs gasped for air. But no, I determined to go the whole distance, one step after another, with my son by my side.

Let us also as fathers endeavor to lead our loved ones on the path to the heavenly kingdom, even though we find the path to be straight, narrow and ever ascending. Even when the way is most trying let us not despair. With our eyes ever upward and our hand firmly about

our loved ones, let us rightly lead them on the path, taking the steps to even higher ground.

When my son and I reached the summit that day, what a sense of accomplishment was ours! And we had done it together as a team. As we canoed out that evening by the light of the moon, a tear or two came to my eyes as I sensed the special bonding that was taking place. I think of the prayer of Christ, found in John 17:21: "That they all may be one; as thou Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe."

This oneness will be found in our families when we give ourselves as Christ gave of Himself. It will require consistent effort and self-sacrifice, but the prize is well worth the price.

Will you not join with me now in answering the prayer of Christ and the prophecy in Malachi in "turning the heart of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers?" Let us put our arm fully around our precious families and with a secure hold on them, then reach out to a perishing world. By the grace of Christ we will finish the work and go home to our heavenly Father.

## Power for Living



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