

FATHERS AND SONS – DALLAS WILLARD

Some years ago, it occurred to me that as a minister, I probably had nothing better to do than try to teach exactly what Jesus taught in exactly the way he taught it. And so, I've tried to do that. And I think that the Spirit of God, in the hearts of people, often gives a blessing which has nothing to do with me but has much to do with the Word which Jesus came to give us. He came to preach a Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven, to put us at home, in the Father's family.

These two songs that were just sung, so bless my heart. As I was sitting there, I was thinking, I don't have anything really to add to that and I can't make it sound near as pretty as that. I will try to say a few things about it in relationship to us as men. I think we all lose sight of the fact that when we come to talk about fathers and sons, really, we're talking about men. That's the heart of being a man is our relationship to one another. We may not have a son, but we certainly have a father and that is the source of our life. We can only have that relationship right as we come to the place to where we are living under our Heavenly Father. As we come to live under our Heavenly Father, then all of the things that have been wrong between our father and us, and other men can be healed.

I want to begin by reading a couple of verses. One right at the end of the Old Testament. This is a promise, that is a great promise. But on the other hand, it looks back at the failure of the Old Testament. The Old Testament means an Old Covenant; doesn't it? An old agreement. We'd often do better if we would speak of the old agreement and the new agreement, or the old will and the new will, it would be a lot more communicative, because the word testament doesn't mean much anymore. We may hear someone in a movie say, "The last will and testament" and so forth and so on. We need to understand that this is an agreement, it's a will, it's a covenant. That old covenant failed for lack of the perfection which would come in through Jesus Christ.

As we come down to the end of the Old Testament, the last few verses, we read these words,

"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 I want you to notice the order. It is for the father's hearts first to be turned to the children and then the heart of the children to their fathers,



"...lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

The curse of sin rests upon the unhealed relationships at the heart of our families. Between fathers and sons, between brothers, and of course, between mothers and sisters, and uncles and aunts. All the way up.

One of the interesting things about the Old Testament is it is a family book. And when you pick up and start reading right in the beginning, it's a family book. Some of those things in there make great movies, even soap operas, the way those stories go. You start out right with Adam and Eve and you get something going on there between them that leads to their downfall, then Cain and Abel and on and on and on. Bright Spots and dark spots. Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob are a family coming down through the ages. We have to understand the importance of our families.

The family is in real trouble today, partly because of the fact that we continue to exist in an unredeemed world. Let me tell you something, history teaches us that the family will not be able to work apart from God. The family which does not find its place under the rule of heaven, The Kingdom of God, is a family where there will be unhealed misery.

Many of us, when we look at our fathers, we see someone who was deeply troubled, and perhaps failed in life, and regarded himself as a failure. I remember my father when he came down to the end of his life. He was a good man, but as it came down to the end of his life, he used to say, as he would sit and think about his life, "I just wish that I had known what I was supposed to do in my life." Is that a statement that reflects the condition which we're in? We were raised in it, and many times, even though we are Christians, we were never able to come to terms with what we're supposed to do in our lives.

Often, our families upset us more than they guide us into what this should be. The Old Testament is a family book and when it comes down to the end of it, for all of the grace of God that is manifested in it, there is still the unhealed relationship at the center of human life. The fathers whose hearts are turned away from the sons and the sons whose hearts are turned away from the father.

And now what this does, you see, it robs us of the ability to enter into the great stream of life and the wisdom of God that comes down to us through past generations and is present in the Bible and should be present in the elders who live in our family. We are meant to learn from our elders. Let me tell you something, most of the things that amount to the most in life you cannot learn by being told. Let me say that again. We have that phrase, "You can't tell him anything." You ever hear that? "That's the way people are." And you want to remember



that when you're trying to tell your kid something. People can't learn most of the things which matter most, by simply being told.

Now they can learn it in what we call the College of Hard Knocks. But then, by the time they get through it, they're so bruised and broken many times and there are so many wounds that they're going to spend the rest of their lives coping with the hurts that they've done to others and that others have done to them. I mean, just think of how we enter our marriages and how ignorant we are. And how many mistakes we make.

There is one way besides these two ways:

- Being told
- The College of Hard Knocks.

You know the old saying, "We grow too soon old and too late smart." The other way is:

- To be with people. You can learn things by being with people.

You know how rare it is today for a group of people like this to get together for any time at all. It's very rare. Our society has set itself up in such a way that men of all ages are rarely together for any length of time at all. Young men get together. Oh, men do get together. Middle aged men get together, men on the prowl. But we don't have times anymore when men sit down with one another and live and learn what life is like. We just don't have that. And there is no other way. No other good way that we can receive what the New Testament, when it brings that Old Testament verse over in Luke 1:17 calls,

"the wisdom of the just"

Listen to the way that the Holy Spirit brought that passage over into the New Testament in

Luke 1:17. "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah,

to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children."

That's the same as the other one was. But notice how the New Testament rephrases the second clause, you remember the second clause?

"...and turn the children's heart to their fathers."

Now listen to the way it's put in this verse,

"and turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just."

Read that again now so that you will have the full effect,

"to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,



and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

"The wisdom of the just," is what I'm talking about. I'm talking about people who are able to be together in such a way, that by being with one another, the younger learn from the older whose hearts are turned toward them.

There's so much here to say this morning. I find it hard to begin on it, but let's just say that we want to look at that phrase first, "The father's hearts to the children." Let's just ask about it now and think about it in application to ourselves. If the father's hearts are not turned to the children, where are the father's hearts turned?

Well, to many things. I think the only answer is many things, many things. Father's hearts are turned towards things like perhaps adventure, perhaps security, perhaps respectability, perhaps looking good, being cool, and all these other things. Your heart is turned to what you're concerned about.

Now, we are in a hard time for men in this world. If I were talking to women, I'd say we're in a hard time for women, but I'm not talking to women this morning. And we're in a hard time for men. We're in a hard time for men to understand who they are and what they're supposed to do. We live in times of great sexual confusion. We live in times of great confusion about the meaning of work and jobs and finances and so on. Great confusion. We live in times of great confusion about what is it to be happy.

And we have many men that are just constantly going through the pain of deciding are they or are they not happy? And why not? And what would make me happy? And is this the woman I ought to be living with? And how are my kids doing? And what's my job mean? Do I have a job that's respectable? Many, many men are just ground up in the feeling that somehow, they don't have a job that would give them dignity. There's just so many things that are just crushing the soul of the man. And let me just say that's one other reason why we need friends. We need to be together and be able to look at one another and be with one another and just see how we're going to get through.

Not long ago, in the society I was raised in, there were many occasions on which men were together and they weren't doing anything but being together. You can describe a lot of these situations. We used to have things called fox hunts. We wouldn't have needed a fox to be within 80 miles, because we really used them as an excuse to go out in the woods and build a fire and sit around that fire and talk and whittle and spit. It was a real problem if the dogs got a fox in a situation where it wouldn't keep running, because then we'd have to get up and go do something about it. The real business was sitting and being with one another, just being with one another. Same way with fishing. Fish bother you if they bite. The main point of



fishing was not to get fish, but to talk. And if you caught, you know, that gave you something to talk about, but you can talk just as well about not catching.

We live in a world where everything is so harried and so rushed that if you do something like that people say, "What's wrong with you? Why aren't you out doing something? Getting Ahead?" Well, if you aren't getting ahead, you ought to get ahead, but you know, getting ahead, isn't the only thing in this world. Getting Ahead of who? And by the way, which direction are we running? See, there are deep questions about life. We need to be able to take our hearts from all of these things and turn them to one another. And above all, to turn to our children. We need to pay attention to our children.

The concept of family that is biblical has a larger reference than to just the biological role. Above all, it has reference to the Heavenly Father and his family. And in that family, we need to be able to have time where we are just with one another. Just human beings being with one another, with our children. We need to have time when we're just paying attention to them by just being with them. There's something strange about it, but if you're doing it just to be with him, that somehow fails, because then it becomes another job.

It's very hard in our society to have a situation where we're just together, doing nothing, or doing something. because those are circumstances when we turn our hearts to one another. Those are the relationships in which we're able to receive and transmit the wisdom of the just. The wisdom of the just is transmitted in a situation where those who are perhaps older or stronger are able to transmit what they have learned from living under God to young people who cannot get it any other way. But by living through it, and perhaps looking back when it's too late, receive the wisdom of the just.

What is the wisdom of the just? Primarily, the wisdom of just has to do with the knowledge of God. It has to do with the knowledge of God's rule. I love this wonderful verse in Second Chronicles 16:9 "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong on the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him." That is to say, on the behalf of those who have got themselves squarely focused upon God. And that is the secret of the wisdom of the just. There is nothing more necessary than that those who know it and have lived it should be with others, especially the younger ones, so that they can learn that there are a lot of parts to that wisdom.

Let me just say the beginning point of all is the acceptance, the acceptance of every person for who they are. Did you watch this heartbreaking episode on 20/20 last night? It was about teenagers who are undergoing plastic surgery for cosmetic reasons. The two leading candidates are liposuction, you know that's where they take this rod and stick it under your skin and suck out your fat cells, and having your nose fixed. Now you see what lies back of



that is massive, large scale epidemic rejection. People who are so concerned about acceptance because they feel condemned. They feel rejected. They live in a world where that's the main thing that comes upon them.

As a man, when you go out to do your work, and live in this world, you get a lot of rejection. Don't you get a lot of rejection? And some jobs are worse than others. And sometimes personal circumstances make it worse, but every one of us know what rejection is. There's only one answer to rejection and that's the acceptance of God. You'll never find it any other way. It doesn't matter what you do.

I've watched marriages. You'll have a perfectly fine man or woman, good looking, strong, intelligent, and all of that. But they get a mate who decides to tear them down. It doesn't take that mate more than just a few seconds to have them almost totally destroyed in their own esteem; their understanding of themselves. No matter how pretty a woman is or how strong she may be, if a man gets unhappy with her and goes after her, he'll tear her to shreds. The same thing with a man, no matter how strong, how good. Acceptance doesn't have to do with what you are on the outside. There's only one way that we can have acceptance, and that is to receive the Kingdom of Heaven in our life and learn to receive that day by day, and to learn to live before the God "Whose eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong." See, that's the acceptance that cures the sore in the heart and that heals the relationship between fathers and sons, between brothers, between brothers and sisters, and all of the family relationships and beyond that, to neighbors. That is the acceptance, which enables us not only to love our neighbor as ourselves, but the greater command which Jesus gave was,

"Love one another, as I have loved you."

That's much greater than any kind of love that we might know, because even if we were able to love one another as we love ourselves, we don't even love ourselves as Christ loved us. It's in the acceptance and the knowledge and the reality of that love, as the Spirit of God brings the Kingdom to flow through our hearts that we have the acceptance which will allow us to reach out to our children and accept them for what they are, how they look, and how smart they are, their health, their size, all of those things. Accept them for what they are.

When we have a child, we don't go shopping for something that will fit our bill. We open our lives and we let God send another little life into us. It's one of the greatest things you'll ever do is to make another human being. That's one of the greatest things you'll ever do. Now we've come to the place today, where many people cannot think about having children in



that way. Often, children feel the rejection that is around them from the world. It says we have too many babies, too many of the wrong kinds of babies. We're talking about abortion, but when you get into watching how abortion is practiced you will notice such embarrassing things in many areas of our country. Parents determine to abort after they've decided that the child fits a certain criteria or doesn't. Sometimes it's very simple. Sometimes, and this is a fact, many fetuses are being aborted when it's discovered that they are female, because they are from a cultural background which values boys more than girls. That's just a reflection of a pervasive attitude. An attitude of rejection unless you fit the bill.

We are standing in the Kingdom of Heaven which says there are no unwanted children. Everyone is a child that is created by God. There are no accidents from God's point of view. And in the Kingdom of Heaven, we have the resources of strength and wisdom and love to receive every child and make a place for them by the grace and by the power of God. Only in that context can the wounds that afflict the generations be healed. It is the vision of the Kingdom which gives us these great examples of faith, like we see in a David, who is ready to go out and face Goliath, not because of confidence in himself, but because he has tried the Kingdom. He has experienced it. He went after the lion and he went after the bear. He said to his older brothers who were standing around behind the fence shaking and to Saul who was scared to death. He says, "Look, this Philistine will be just like the lion and the bear." His confidence was totally in the Kingdom of Heaven. That gave him the strength to live and deal with life from that source.

The same way with that wonderful story in the book of Daniel. Daniel in the lion's den. He doesn't hesitate a moment to pray as he had been praying. He knew that he would be caught. He knew that he would be condemned. He was thrown into the lion's den, but the angels stopped the mouths of the lions. You see, that's the Kingdom of Heaven. The angels are sent forth to minister to those who would be heirs of salvation. That's the reality of that Kingdom.

In the wisdom of that Kingdom, we are then set free to deal with one another and with our children. As men in particular, we're set free to communicate with one another. We're no longer afraid of one another. You know, fear dominates the ordinary relationships between men; hostility and anger, unless they are redeemed. Even in our churches, men are frightened of one another. They're frightened to really communicate with one another. That means to really listen to what another person is saying, to really be with what they're going through. We're frightened to reveal ourselves, because we don't understand the kind of love which is real in the Kingdom of Heaven. But once we have that vision, the way that the Word of God comes to heal those relationships, is that it allows us to communicate, it allows us to honor one another.



The scripture says, "Honor all men." And I wonder if you have thought about that? Honor. My ability to honor others is one of the single most important things to my health. You remember that in the great 10 Commandments, we have,

"Honor thy father and mother, that your days may be long on the land,"

or in the place. What's that about? We're not just talking about some mysterious spiritual thing that has nothing to do with where we live. We're talking about where we live. We're talking about our health and my ability to honor others. I'm not just talking about my father and my mother. I'm talking about coming into this group of people. My ability to honor you in my relationship to you. What does it mean to honor? It means to be grateful for you. It means to be thankful that you exist. It means to think in terms of the beauty and goodness that is in you. You remember Paul teaches us in Philippians 2, he says,

"Let nothing be done from strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind,

let each esteem the other better than himself."

That's honoring. Humility is not a matter of putting ourselves down, it's a matter of lifting up other people. Learn to honor. When we honor our father it's often hard because many times our father did or did not do what was right and perhaps mistreated us and perhaps mistreated others. We see wickedness in our family, but I want to tell you that it is possible when you understand, and you see things from the perspective of the Kingdom of Heaven. You are able to do that, to honor your father.

The greatest thing you can do for your father is to honor him and many people have not been able to do that, partly because they haven't been taught. With the absence of teaching, they have confused honoring with saying that their father didn't do anything wrong. Right now, the answer to whatever wrongs the father may have done is forgiveness. When the forgiveness is there, then compassion, then honor can come. And we can be thankful that they have existed because they are the source of our life.

When you cannot Honor your father, what you're really saying is something about you. You're saying that your life is not good. You're saying, you cannot be thankful for your life. There's it is. If you're going to be thankful for your life, it enables you then to honor your father. If you cannot be thankful for your life, you cannot honor your father. What we see here at the midst of this is being thankful for our life. It comes to us renewed because we have learned how the Word of the Kingdom of God has come to us and has given us new life. If we didn't exist, we wouldn't have that, would we? Because without the first birth, there's no second birth. Right? So, we're able now that we come to understand our place in God's Kingdom. We're able to hear the voice of God coming to us and saying to us where we are,



"It is a good thing for you to exist.

It is a good thing for you to be.

I treasure you.

I love you.

I have given you work in this world, and your life will count.

Give it to me and your life will count.

You will make a difference for good.

And your life will be something that honors others and is honored in return."

We need to be able, on such a basis, to be able to bless the lives of other people. So many young men today, and old men, and middle-aged men, and all kinds of men go through life hurting, and rejected.

I want to teach you something about blessing to conclude the thoughts this morning. It is very important for you to be able to bless other people. Don't be confused and think that if you're blessing them that means the blessing comes from you. Know it doesn't come from you. It's available from God, and you can get it. And I'm going to go over the blessing that was given by God to the people of Israel in a moment and I want to give you some words. I want to tell you fathers, if you have not been able to bless your son, you are holding something from that child that is the most precious thing you can ever receive. The blessing of his father.

We have almost lost that out of our culture altogether. I mean, if you look at the television portrayals of dads, how do dads come out? Pretty wimpy, pretty silly, pretty weak, pretty foolish. You see that's part of Satan's conspiracy to spoil the very nucleus of family relations so that he can poison the stream of your life. For you to purify that stream you must know, under the blessing of God, that you can pass on that blessing to others in faith. It isn't just for fathers and sons. Sons also need to know how to bless their fathers, and some of you who are older, may well need to be able to bless your father.

You may need to take words, such as we're going to look at here in a moment. They're familiar to you. And you may need to go to them. Some of you know a man in your neighborhood that you need to go and bless. You know, if you're blessed people, you may find that it's the most effective form of witnessing on the face of the earth is to bless them. Carry the blessing of God to them and give it to them. Just put it on. You have the power to send what is in you forth upon another person.



I don't have time this morning to go into the New Testament, but if you will study it, you will find that that lies in your power. That is at your disposal. We are meant to be a stream of blessing to all who around us. And we need to be able to go to others, whether there are relatives or not, and give them the blessing of the Kingdom of God.

Let's just think about these words. Now for a moment, you will find them in Numbers 6:22-27, so you probably know them already. I want to just say them, and I wish you just think about them. Now as I say them.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord bless you. Say, "I bless." Not in my own name. But in the Lord's name. *The Lord bless you and keep you* or guard you. You see, men don't know that there is a guard available. They're out there sparring around trying to make it on their own and to do unto others before they do under them and all that sort of thing. It's a primary problem, isn't it? Jesus was a blue-collar worker most of his life. We might today call him an independent contractor. All of the things that Jesus taught; you can be sure he put into action. Before he became a rabbi, he was the head of the family. He had to do everything from raising the children to making the living. He had people come and borrow his tools and not bring them back. He knew what it was like to have people take things away from him, to complain about his work, to see if they couldn't get the price down a little bit. Say, "The Lord bless you and keep you." There is someone to keep you. You know the little child's prayer, "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep, I pray the Lord, my soul to keep." He is the keeper. "He that keepeth Israel shall not slumber nor sleep." So the Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you.

What does that say to you? That speaks of a God who is present. And the meaning of Heaven is the direct and immediate presence of God to those who trust in Him.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord, lift up his countenance.

That means the Lord look right at you. That's what that says. The Lord look right at you and give you peace, peace there. The word shalom does not just mean no war. It's a very rich term that refers to a general condition of wellbeing in which war would be unthinkable because of the abundance and the health and the strength that is there. There's really nothing to fight. *The Lord bless you, and keep the Lord make his face to shine upon you.* Be gracious unto you, look right at you and give you peace.



I'm wondering if I could just ask you now to just sort of think about the person that you would like to send a blessing upon. It may be someone who has already gone on to be with the Lord. It may be someone that you haven't seen for a long time. It may be someone that has been alienated from you or it may be your children or your grandchildren, your wife, a loved one, a friend and acquaintance. I'm just wondering if I could ask you to think right now about who that would be?

Then I wish you just say these words with me slowly and meditatively as you think about that person.

The Lord bless you. Would you say it with me?

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you.

and be gracious to you

and the Lord lift up his countenance upon you

and give you peace.

Do you know that many people who have been Christians for 40 years cannot look another person in the face and say those words?