

GOD SAVE THE KING

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Isa.11:6

Have you ever tried to describe a father? It isn't as easy as it seems. Mr. Webster tried it and concluded a father is "a male parent" which is a rather prosaic way of putting it. Or, he added, "one to whom filial affection and respect is due." But these definitions seem rather cold and uninspiring, don't they?

Someone has said,

"A father is a person who is forced to endure childbirth without anesthetic."

Someone else has observed that

"A father is a thing that growls when it feels good, and laughs very loud when it's scared to death."

Paul Harvey suggests that

"Fathers are what give daughters away to other men who aren't nearly good enough, so they can have grandchildren who are smarter than anybody else."

However you define the word, the fact remains that fathers -- more than anyone else -- are aware of the truth of what the prophet said:

"A little child shall lead them" (Isa.11:6).

For a good father never feels entirely worthy of the worship he sees in his children's eyes. He knows he's not the knight in shining armor his daughter thinks he is. Nor the conquering hero his son believes him to be.

Perhaps that's why a father took his pen in hand and wrote this moving poem:

"To feel his little hand in mine, so clinging and so warm,
To know he thinks me strong enough to keep him safe from harm:

To see his simple faith in all I say or do,
It sort o'shames a fella, but it makes him better, too:
And I am trying hard to be the man he fancies me to be,
Because I have this chap at home who thinks the world o' me.

I would not disappoint his trust for anything on earth,
Nor let him know how little I just naturally am worth.
And after all, it's easier, that brighter road to climb,
With the little hands behind me to push me all the time.
And I reckon I'm a better man than what I used to be,
Because I have this chap at home who thinks the world o' me.“

It was a feeling something like that which caused Studdard Kennedy, the famed British preacher, to pen the lines which have become an inspiration to me and which provided the seed thought for the sermon I preach today.

Dr. Kennedy put it this way:

“I'm the king of a tiny kingdom of three sons. I desire above all things
that they may grow fair and fine and free.

“Not seldom am I filled with fear because of my responsibility. And
because of the knowledge which that fear brings, each day of my life
I pray: God save the king.“

There is something beautiful in the simplicity of that brief paragraph. It goes right to the core of my obligations as a father. It reminds me that in the economy of God, I was given the responsibility of seeing to the welfare of those loyal “subjects“ that comprise my household. For in the plan which God ordained, a man is to be the temporal and spiritual leader of the home. He is to reign supreme over his tiny realm and his rule is to be governed by the law of love.

Now, when God devised this plan, He was not suggesting that women are inferior. In fact, the very opposite is true. It is because of their infinite worth that He provided a protector.

A jeweller leaves the cheap and tawdry costume jewelry in his showcase when he goes home at night. But he throws a protective shield of steel around his diamonds. That which is of special worth is given special care. And, it is because our wives are of great value that we cherish them and honor them. It is only when they strive to be equal that they lose their God-given superiority.

So you see, in the plan of God, the man is to be the head of the home. But some men are unwilling to live up to their responsibility. They are unwilling to pay the price of leadership. So they abdicate their throne. They refuse to live up to the demands that domestic royalty places upon them. They choose to be commoners instead of kings. They make a tired joke about having religion in their wife's name. And they salve their conscience by placing their women folk on a pedestal they may very well deserve, but do not want.

They simply refuse to fulfill their destiny -- to bear their rightful burden -- and so men who were born to be kings become knaves and their wives, out of sheer necessity, take over the helm of the home.

A mother was urging her five year old son to stop yelling, and "be good." He said, "I'll be good for a quarter." She said, "Why can't you be good for nothing, like your father?"

Other men err in another direction. They exploit and misuse the position God has entrusted to them. Instead of being loving kings, they become lustful tyrants. They envision themselves as lions and their wives as beasts of prey. Their children are important because they constitute a kind of wealth. But their whole idea of marriage and parenthood is based on what they can get, rather than what they can give.

How distant from the plan set forth in God's word which says:

"Husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the church" (Ephs 5:25).

And what is the mark of Christ's love of the church? It is a cross. The symbol of self-denial. And I say to you: a home can never know the true heights of human happiness unless there is a cross in the heart of the man who calls himself husband and father.

If a man is to be honored, he must be honorable. If he is to be obeyed, he must be worthy of obedience. For when a man learns to love his wife as Christ loves the church, she in turn will have no trouble in submitting herself to his "rule" of love. Nor will his children find it hard to obey him as they have been commanded to do.

And what are the exacting standards a man must meet if he is to live up to his royal calling? What are his kingly tasks? Well, certainly a good king has concern for the physical, moral and spiritual needs of his subjects.

1 Physical Needs

Marie Antoinette made mockery of her royal standing when told her people had no bread to eat and thus were starving, she said, "Let them eat cake."

Of course, enlightened men would never be so crude as that. In fact, most men lean over backwards to provide the table-fare their family needs. But there are other physical needs which are just as important as food and clothing. Sometimes we fathers become so busy with the job of bread-winning we fail to supply the equally important factors of understanding, companionship, emotional security and that plain old-fashioned thing called love.

The importance of these factors in the lives of our subjects is something we "kings" cannot ignore. During the last great war, British parents were encouraged to send their children to special camps in the country where they would be safe from the bombing. But tests showed later that the children who stayed with their parents, even though they had to endure the hell of the London blitz, were by far the happier of the two. Danger was not a factor when they had the security of parental love and home to help them meet it.

If we fathers are going to be worthy of our kingly calling, and are going to provide our “subjects” with those things they most need, then we shall see to it that along with the more obvious physical needs of food, shelter and clothing, we shall provide the less tangible, but equally essential, needs of love and emotional security.

2 Moral Needs

And then we will help meet their moral needs. Edward Everett Hale, the distinguished Boston preacher and author of The Man Without A Country, tells how, when he was a small boy, he did rather poorly in school. Later, of course, he became an outstanding scholar. But he recounts the disappointment he felt when he got his first report card. He was way down at the bottom of his class and was terribly disheartened about it. He was particularly hesitant to show the report card to his father because his father was a brilliant man.

Fortunately, his father was not only learned, he was wise! When he saw his son’s chagrin, he said to him with great tenderness and understanding,

“Never mind, Edward, I notice you were first in good behavior, and son, that means more to me than to have you at the head of the class and not behave well.“

Edward Everett Hale recounts that experience in one of his books and says of it:

“That was one of the most stirring and heartening experiences of my life. My father’s understanding and sympathy, making me see that behavior was more important than high grades, gave me a courage such as nothing else on earth ever gave me.

“I might never become a great scholar, but I could always be a good boy and a good man. That was within the reach of my abilities, and I therefore resolved that, whatever else I might become, I would

always see to it that my behavior record was high.“

You see, every father is a teacher whether he realizes it or not. Sometimes when we think deeply upon it, we are frightened to contemplate the lessons we have taught when we are least aware of being teachers.

A Sunday school teacher told me recently about one of the youngsters in her class who had developed a habit of lying. When this teacher tried to correct the child, the youngster answered:

“Oh, my parents don’t care. They tell stories themselves. The other night they told me they would be right in the living room downstairs.

But when I peeked through the door, I saw a strange lady there. My parents had gone out to their club.“

Without being consciously aware of it, that mother and father had been teachers. Very effective teachers I might add. J. Edgar Hoover made the following statement in a recent article:

“If I had a son, I’d probably be frightened. I have never feared the responsibilities which have come to me in nearly thirty years’ experience with crime and criminals, but if I were a father I might be afraid. So much would depend upon me. I’d feel it would be my fault if my son didn’t grow up to be a fine, honest man. A good citizen in every sense of the word.

“If I had a son, I’d swear to do one thing: I’d tell him the truth. I’d never let him catch me in a lie because I’d never tell him any lies. And in return, I’d insist he tell the truth.“

And then he said something I’ve tried to emulate. He said,

“I’d have few laws, but they’d be enforced.“

So very often we make so many rules that even we can’t enforce them. And every time we establish

a standard of behavior and then fail to enforce it, we're teaching our children that, in the last analysis, rules are made to be ignored. And it's that kind of attitude of disrespect for law and order that produces problem people in later life.

For that reason alone, it is essential that we who are domestic kings must demand the highest standards of honesty and morality in ourselves. Only then are we justified in insisting on the same high standards from the citizens of our tiny kingdom.

3 Spiritual Needs

May I also suggest that along with the physical and moral needs of our subjects, we, as fathers, have a kingly task to care for their spiritual life as well.

You see, parents are the most important teachers of religion in the world. And because God ordained that the man should be the head of his house in every sense, his obligations in this matter are beyond calculation.

There are thousands of fathers who have given their children everything but God. They have worked long and hard to provide good food, warm clothing, and adequate housing. They have read them comic books, but not the bible. They have gone with them to the movies, but have sent them to church alone.

They have taken the time to teach them good hygiene so they could take care of their bodies, but have failed completely to teach them good religion so they could take care of their souls.

And there is something wrong, isn't there, with that way of thinking which says three hours in a movie are harmless for a child, but two hours at church in Sunday School is too much for her nervous system!

There is something wrong, isn't there, with a man who says it is essential that his children follow his

ideas when it comes to such things as brushing teeth, shining shoes, and keeping clean, but when it comes to religion, the children must make up their own minds, for he doesn't want to prejudice them!

Would that father allow weeds to grow in his garden because he didn't want to prejudice the ground in favor of roses? Of course not. Such thinking falls under the weight of its own stupidity. A man may let weeds grow in his garden because he doesn't care about gardening, or because he's too lazy to pull them out, but he would never be foolish enough to try to tell us it was because he didn't want to force his will on the ground.

And likewise a man may let the weeds of religious ignorance grow up around his children because he simply doesn't care about their souls, or because he's too lazy to get out of bed and go to Sunday School or church with them, but in the name of decency, let him be honest enough to say so rather than try to rationalize his indifference by calling it "broad-mindedness."

And while we're on this theme, let me say this: In scores of personal consultations with parents all over this country, and in other lands as well, I have never yet met a parent who took this lackadaisical attitude toward the religious training of their children who had a vital personal faith of their own. In every single case, the people who have said:

"I don't want to impose my beliefs upon my children"
have been people who had little, if any, positive beliefs to impose!

They were men and women to whom Christ and the church meant little, so they quite naturally had no real reason to ask their children to follow them. But whether they realized it or not, by their indifference and inactivity, they were imposing upon their children fundamental attitudes toward Christ and the church which would stay with those children as long as they live.

A little boy whose father had sent him to Sunday School, but did not go himself, came up to his Daddy one day and said, "Dad, did you go to Sunday school when you were a boy?" "Yes, son, I always went to Sunday school." "Well, Dad, I think I'll quit going. It isn't doing me any good

either.” We can smile at the humor of the story, but I hope that through the humor we can get the point which is this: “Rule by edict will never replace rule by example.”

A good king knows that to be truly successful there must be something uncommon about his own personal application of that which he claims to be good for his people. He must set a kingly example.

Our former president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, made a magnificent contribution to his country in that respect. He attended church nearly every Sunday, and on those Sundays when he could not attend, he called his pastor and explained why. Now, please don’t do that. I’d never get anything done if all four hundred members who don’t come to church every Sunday phoned to tell me why.

But the thing I’m saying is this: Recognizing the importance of his position, Mr. Eisenhower did his best to set a good example, and by so doing found that his own faith had been strengthened and his own life had been blessed. And that’s the experience of every father who has tried to live up to his royal task. By flexing his moral and spiritual muscles in an effort to lift the level of his family living, he himself has been strengthened. He has somehow learned to walk with a nobler step, his head held high and his eyes direct, for he knows he has done his best. And, with as much as in him lies, has lived up to his kingly calling.

So you see, Studdard Kennedy spoke well and wisely when in sublime simplicity he wrote those words which every father here this morning should trace upon the fleshy tablet of his heart:

“I am the king of a tiny kingdom of three sons. I desire above all things that they may grow fair and fine and free. Not seldom am I filled with fear because of my responsibility, and because of the knowledge which that fear brings, each day of my life I pray: God Save The King!”