

WHAT EVERY CHILD DESERVES

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Malachi 4:6

One of the most beautiful verses in all the bible is Malachi 4:6, the very last verse in the Old Testament.

“And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.”

Wouldn’t life be good if that could really happen in America today?

As someone has suggested, wouldn’t our home really be

“a little hollow scooped out of the windy chill of the world if each father’s heart was turned to his children and each child’s heart was turned to his father?”

Well, the purpose of Father’s Day is to help foster such a spirit. Of course, Father’s Day is sort of an anti-climax after Mother’s Day and Children’s Day. It’s almost as if someone said:

“Oh, yes, there’s poor Dad. Let’s not forget him!”

It’s somewhat sobering to realize we take seven days to celebrate National Pickle Week and one day to honor Dad.

A grade school teacher asked a little girl to tell the class what Father’s Day was. The child thought for a moment and then said,

“It’s just like Mother’s Day only you don’t spend as much for the present.”

Well, even though we joke about it, we recognize that Father’s Day is important because it gives Dad a chance to reflect again upon the importance of the task he undertook when he chose to

bring children into the world.

It's almost impossible to overemphasize the importance of that task because, when Jesus wanted to help people clearly understand what God is like, *He* called him "Father".

It was a new idea.

Folks hadn't really thought of God like that before.

But the more they thought of it, the more this idea of God as "Father" gripped them and *then* they began to see this as a two-way street. When Jesus used the illustration of the love and forgiveness of a good father as a picture of God, He was challenging fathers to remember that by their life they give

their children,

their family,

and their world

a reflection of what God is like. And that reflection—that picture—can be true or distorted depending upon the man.

A Sunday School teacher was telling her children about God. She described Him as

kind,

loving,

strong,

and thoughtful.

One who could conquer the world.

Who could meet obstacles with courage.

Who would not be afraid of the dark.

Who would supply them with everything they needed.

When she finished, she turned to the children and asked:

"Does that description make you think of anyone you know?"

A tiny hand went up with quick eagerness and a little boy jumped to his feet and said, "Yes, that's my Pop!"

This morning, as we think together about What Every Child Deserves, remember please that the preacher is talking as much to himself as he is to you. He, too, is a Dad who knows full well that he is not *really* worthy of the worship he sees in his children's eyes.

Well, what *does* every child deserve? First of all, I think every child deserves

The Right Kind of Inner-braces.

You see, there isn't a great deal we can do to change the outward circumstances in which our children must live. That doesn't mean we should

throw in the towel,
let the world go to seed, and
make no effort to improve our environment.

But with all our efforts, a change for the better is slow in coming.

We can give our children something better than an ideal outward environment. We can provide them with the right kind of inner-resources so that, regardless of the pressures of their environment, they will live radiant and abundant lives.

Right now I'm thinking of the old fable of an ancient despot who, having hurt his foot on a stone, ordered his servants to cover the whole earth with leather. According to the tradition, his servants devised a better plan:

They invented shoes of leather to be placed on each man's feet.

Medical science has learned that it cannot completely isolate people from the world of germs but that anti-toxins injected into the bloodstream will provide an inner resistance against the billions of germs which attack the body. In the spiritual realm, while we can never shield our children from

all temptations of life—nor should we attempt to do so—we *can* inject them with Christian ideals, values and memories which will build up resistance to temptation whenever it comes.

In St. Paul's letter to Timothy he reminds his young pastoral assistant that from his earliest childhood, Timothy had been instructed in the sacred writings by his grandmother and mother. The faith which he so sincerely follows was instilled in him from the moment of his birth. Then Paul urges Timothy to continue to believe the things he has learned and to remember from whom he has learned them.

One of the great needs of the American home—and one of the things every child deserves—is parents who are not afraid to guide their children according to the deepest convictions of their own hearts.

There are those who advocate that a child must not be prejudiced or conditioned religiously, but must be allowed to choose for himself.

J. Edgar Hoover has something to say about this fantastic idea:

“Why all this timidity in the realm of spiritual guidance and growth? You don't wait until your child is old enough to decide whether or not he wishes to go to school, or whether or not he wants to take a bath to see that he is clean. Or until he is old enough to know whether or not he wishes to take medicine to see that he takes what will make him well.

“Let's be done with the old wives' tale about 'too much religion when I was young, my parents made me go.' Do you suppose because you insist over his protests that junior take his bath tonight he will turn out to be a 'bathless groggins' when he is 21?

“Do you suppose that because you insist he take his medicine, he will take up Christian Science ten years from now?

“What shall we say when Junior announced he doesn’t like Sunday School or church? That’s an easy one,” says Mr. Hoover. “Just be consistent. Your firmness and example will furnish a bridge over which youthful rebellion may travel into rich and satisfying experiences in personal religious living. The parents of America can strike a most effective blow against the forces which contribute to juvenile delinquency, if our mothers and fathers would take their children to Sunday School and church regularly.”

That’s not a theologian speaking, but rather the Director of the F.B.I., and he’s saying that instead of being afraid to guide our children we ought to recognize that if *we* don’t, *someone else will!*

The radio and television tell them what to eat, what to drink, what to wear. Newspaper columnists, paperback authors and motion picture producers are trying to influence their attitudes. Propagandists of every sort are attempting to mold their habits. Teachers in schools are trying to teach them, if not *what* to think, at least *how* to think.

We live in an age of violent secular indoctrination, and in the midst of this bombardment of ideas—both good and bad—parents *must*, in defense of the sacredness of the home and for the salvation of their children, insist on indoctrination in the Christian way of life.

We *must* prejudice our child in favor of right against wrong.

We *must* indoctrinate them with truth as a defense against error.

We *must* realize that our child is more than a body, he or she is also a mind to instruct, a life to direct, and a life to save.

By giving our youngsters the right kind of inner-braces from the moment of their birth, they will then be prepared for whatever life brings. And it will be the most natural thing in the world for them to *become* Christians in their adolescence and to *be* Christians throughout the adult years of their lives.

But if this is going to be done effectively, not only must we *tell* our children what is right. We must also *show* them what is right, for the second thing every child deserves is

The Right Kind of Parental Example.

Dads, you and I are teachers whether we know it or not. By our example, we are influencing the direction our children will take.

One day a father who drank moderately was stepping through the snow to go to his favorite bar. He hadn't gone far when he heard a little voice behind him saying, "Wait, Daddy, I'm coming, too!" He turned around to see his little boy stepping as far as he could on each step to be sure his feet went in the tracks of his father. Witnessing that scene changed that father. He said to himself, "If my little son is so careful to step exactly in my steps, I must be very careful where my steps lead." From that moment on, he started living a different life.

I think the poet put it as well as it can be said—

"A careful man I ought to be,
A little fellow follows me.
I dare not go astray
For fear he'll go the self same way.

"I cannot once escape his eyes,
What'ere he sees me do, he tries.
Like me he says he is going to be
That little chap who follows me.

“He thinks that I am good and fine,
Believes in every word of mine.
The base in me he must not see,
That little chap who follows me.

“I must remember as I go
Through summer’s sun and winter’s snow,
I’m building for the years to be
That little chap who follows me.”

Every child deserves a father worth following. A father who is loyal to the home and demonstrates his love in every way. A father who gives his child a little of his time and with whom that child can discuss his or her childhood problems frankly.

Every child deserves a father whose habits are above question. Who refuses to set temptations and wrong examples before his children.

Every child deserves to inherit the right attitude toward people who are different than he. It is a crippling handicap for a child to learn to feel superior to other people. To look condescendingly upon God’s children. To be unkind in their dealings with them. These feelings of superiority are not inherited, they are taught! Every child deserves to learn the right kind of attitudes toward other people.

Every child deserves a home where God is real. A home where Christ is King. Where prayer is a force instead of a farce. Where they can learn from their infancy, by the example of their parents, to turn to the Word of God for guidance and instruction.

Every child deserves to grow up with the right attitude toward the church. He or she deserves parents who will set the right example in this regard—parents who will be regular in their own

attendance—who will lead, and not send, their children to Sunday School.

Every child deserves to learn the right attitude towards stewardship. He or she deserves parents who will set the example and teach their children to give at least a tenth of their income to the work of Christ. And remember, when a father or a mother refuses to tithe his or her income, he or she is teaching the child *by example*—which is more powerful than words—to disobey God and believe that a person can ignore God’s requirements and do just as he or she pleases. To believe that the work of saving the world is unimportant.

There is nothing more pliable than the life of a little child. Those of us who choose to bring these little ones into the world have a holy obligation before God to see that their lives are molded right. Everything we do or say is a message, a lesson inscribed on the hearts of our children.

“Whatever you write on the heart of a child,
No waters can wash it away.
The sands may be shifted when billows are wild
And the efforts of time may decay.
Some stories may perish, some songs be forgot;
But this written record time changes it not.

“Whatever you write on the heart of a child,
A story of gladness or care
That heaven has blessed or that earth defiled,
Will linger unchangeably there.
Who writes it has sealed forever and aye,
He must answer to God on the Great Judgement Day.

There is a story told of a detachment of soldiers in World War I who were cut off from the main division. They were out of food and had to attack. No one seemed to know the way to the enemy lines except one French boy who volunteered to lead the detachment.

He led the way, the battle was won and their safety secured. But the boy was fatally wounded. Medals, honors and cheers were given him for his bravery and his success, but none of these interested him in his dying moments. Not yet knowing all the results of the battle, as he was dying he looked into the eyes of his superior officer and said,

“Tell me, Captain, did I lead them right?”

Every child deserves to be led right. The plaguing question fathers need to ask again and again is: *“By my example, am I leading them right?”* I think every child also deserves

The Right Kind of Memories.

I have said this before and I don’t want to appear to be riding a hobby, but maybe it’s because I’ve had so many funerals lately of people both in and out of the church.

I have observed the difference in the spirit and attitude of the people who mourn when the deceased is a person who possessed a great, dynamic, life-directing Christian faith. There is an aura of peace and a confidence of hope in the heart of their loved ones which is missing in the spirit of those who mourn for one who had no Christian faith.

You see, Mister, we can be rather lackadaisical about our own faith because, after all, we are free to choose our own eternal destiny. But in making that choice, it seems to me that fathers should remember that some day they shall meet the black specter of death and leave behind those who will mourn their passing.

It seems to me that the thoughtful, loving father will have seen to it that his life reflected such a vital, vigorous Christian faith that his children and loved ones who stay behind will have something to cling to, something to remember, and something to cherish.

Every child deserves the memory of a Christian father.

A man who stood four square and unashamedly for the things of God.

A man of principle.

A man of devotion and consecration.

Every child deserves the memory of a Christian home where the echo of father's prayers rings on in their ears. Ruth Elmquist, in her book *Golden Moments of Religious Inspiration*, says:

“I was five years old before I knew that ‘the everlasting arms’, talked about in the bible, belonged to God and not my father. One of my favorite verses, which I often heard my Daddy read around the breakfast table, was ‘The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms’.

She goes on to say:

“I knew exactly how those arms felt. Often my parents had to take me with them to Sunday night service because my father was the preacher and my mother sang in the choir. Wrapped up in a blanket, I was parked on two chairs turned seat to seat in the dark Sunday School room and told, ‘Go to sleep now, Ruthie.’

“At first I was terrified, for it was as black in there as the inside of my mitten. But pretty soon I would hear the choir begin ‘Rock of Ages Cleft For Me’ and the organ would grow and grow ‘till its booming base notes shook my chair-bed. By the time they got to ‘Hiding In Thee’, I would be asleep.

“After church I would only half wake up when dad would come for me, enough to feel his strong arms under me gently, to sense who he was, to feel his rough coat against my cheek, his heart beating

strong and sure under my ear. ‘Bless her, she slept right through. Do you think this blanket is enough for her, sugar?’, he would ask my mother. And then the everlasting arms would carry me home.”

Well, that’s a beautiful memory for a young child to carry with her through all the years of her life: the memory of a father who had caught something of the quality of God’s eternal love.

Every child deserves the right kind of memories. The only way they can have them, Dad, is for you and me to live lives worth remembering.

This means we must have a personal religious faith of our own. As the old country preacher put it:

“You can no more give children what you ain’t got than you can come back from where you ain’t been.”

Then, when we make sure we have a faith, we must learn to share it, live it, practice it, put it to use in every area of our life and home so that, as our children grow older, they will have a storehouse of powerful memories to guide them.

There is no guarantee that the right kind of memories will save them. A child can be lost in spite of such an asset and may have the temptation to wander off.

I have never been one to brag upon my sins. Suffice it to say, as a teenager I fouled up my life about as badly as any boy could. When I was teetering on the brink of disaster and could have taken the final step which would have turned my life away from anything good for all time to come, it was the memory of my father’s prayers and the knowledge that such a turn would break my mother’s heart that brought me back again.

Now that I have a son and daughter of my own, it is my earnest prayer that God will help me to be the kind of father who will give my children memories worth keeping and an example worth following.

On this Father's Day, I think every dad might learn to pray, as Gordon Phillips did,

"Lord, teach me understanding, that I may know the way to my children's heart and mind. Give me strength that I may not fail them in minor tragedies or in great crises. Give me courage that I may stand firm when they are wrong, wayward or needless. Give me humility that I may acknowledge my own mistake when they are right."

Yes, these are the things every child deserves.

The right kind of inner-braces which will be a sure defense against whatever life may bring.

The right kind of parental examples so they will have deeds, and not just words, to follow.

The right kind of memories which they can carry in their hearts as guideposts along the way.

An impossible task? Yes! In and of and by ourselves, it *is* impossible. But thank the Lord we are not asked to do it alone. Our extremity is God's opportunity, and in His word we have this promise: "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him*" (James 1:5).

"Last night my little boy confess to me
Some childish wrong;
And kneeling at my knee
He prayed with tears,
'Dear God, make me a man
Like Daddy—wise and strong—

I know you can.'

“Then while he slept
I knelt beside his bed,
Confessed my sins
And prayed with low-bowed head,
‘Oh God, make me a child
Like my child here,
Pure, guileless,
Trusting Thee with faith sincere.””