

Fathers of Our Flesh

by Leslie Diestelkamp

From the very beginning God ordained that the husband should be the head of the house and, in that position, he should exercise responsibility in guiding the entire family. His duty in such does not include harsh dictatorial rule but it does include diligent dedication to the tasks of oversight. Even Paul admonished, *"Fathers provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"* (Eph. 6:4). Thus Paul established three principles of fatherhood:

1. Generally it is the father, not the mother, who should shoulder the responsibilities of oversight. Fathers are to set the course of action for the whole family. They are to chart the direction of family behavior. Fathers cannot please God if they relinquish their rights nor if they try to shift their obligations. Neither mothers, school teachers, preachers nor any others can replace the father as custodian of family life.
2. But fathers are to direct their families with discretion and wisdom, lest they be provoked to wrath. Decisions must be studied and wise, fair and just. The father's conduct and character must be such that he deserves respect and that his word is honored in the family circle. With kindness and humility, yet with resolution and firmness he must exercise patient, loving leadership in the home that will inspire the children to follow and to obey without rebellion or malice.
3. The nurturing that children must receive is to be provided by the father — that is, he must conduct the family affairs in such a manner that the total impact of family life will be spiritually beneficial. Everything that relates to the development of the child is included in *"nurturing,"* and the emphasis is to be *"in the Lord,"* that is in learning, appreciating and applying the will of God. Over and above his duty as a provider for the physical necessities of the family, the father is to be the provider of spiritual nourishment and exercise.

Hebrews 12:8, 9 (*"We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence"*) suggests proper action for the father and at the same time proper response by the children. But the *"reverence"* or *respect* that is suggested must be earned by the father through the integrity, honesty, justice and consistency of the correction he administers. And perhaps most failures in this regard are not from lack of ability but from lack of devotion to the duties of fatherhood.

Edgar A. Guest said, "There are fathers who are busy and so weighted down with cares, that they haven't time to listen to a little child's affairs." Indeed, undoubtedly the greatest weakness of modern fatherhood is the unwillingness to look upon the responsibilities with sufficient seriousness and devotion. Parental neglect must rank as the blight of our society today, the greatest cause of delinquency, the source of rebellion and the cause of failure in the family circle. Fathers curse the times in which we live, blame the government, accuse the school system and look everywhere for an alibi for failure, yet, the cause of their parental failures lies in their own hearts, their own lives, and their own conduct.

We do not know what kind of life Enoch lived before he became a father, but afterward the Bible tells us *"And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah..."* (Gen. 5:22). Joshua demonstrated the proper attitude and the determination to lead his family when he said to the people, *"Choose you this day whom you will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"* (Josh. 24:15). Likewise, Cornelius *"...feared God with all his house"* (Acts 10:2), showing that his duties as a Roman officer did not prevent fulfillment of his responsibility to his family.

The purpose of this chapter is not to try to list all the big and little things that are involved in proper fatherhood, not to spell out every detail of specific obligations, for these vary from one father to another and even from one child to another, and none of us knows all the answers. But the purpose of this chapter is to try to get fathers to realize their God-given obligations. I believe such men will then be fully capable of discharging their duties—if they can just be challenged to devote themselves to the task. Fathers who really want to guide, lead and nurture their children *will find the right way!* Sincerity of purpose is much more important than a familiarity with all the books men may write on the subject of parenthood.

-- taken from Lesson 8, *The Family Circle*