

Proverbs 4:1-5

Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, he taught me and said, "Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live.

Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them.

Today is Father's Day, a day when Dads are praised, pampered, and maybe even given a present or two. One little boy gave an interesting description of Father's Day. He said, "Father's Day is just like Mother's Day; only you don't have to spend as much on the present." Why is that? Why is more emphasis placed on Mother's Day than Father's Day? Could it be dad brings it on himself? Could it be, in dad's quest to provide for his family he has lost touch with his real purpose?

There is a story of two steamboats that left Memphis about the same time, traveling down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. At one point they traveled side by side, crew members began to make crude remarks about the slowness of the other boat. Words were exchanged. Challenges were made, and the race was on. The competition was exciting as the boats roared down the Mississippi. One boat began to fall behind. Not enough fuel. There was plenty of coal for the trip, but not enough for a race like this. As the one boat dropped back, an enterprising crew member took some of the ship's cargo and tossed it into the fiery engines.

Their boat began to catch up, so they made fuel out of more and more cargo. They finally won the race, but in the process they burned their cargo, the very material they had been hired to transport.

Fathers, grandfathers, actually all adults, our primary mission, contrary to popular belief, is not to just win the race, but to faithfully care for those persons God has entrusted to us, our spouses, and especially our children. If we put too much emphasis on winning we may be burning up the very cargo we were entrusted with.

In today's fast paced world dads, as well as moms have many, often times, competing claims on time, energy, and money. The typical parent, father or mother, could be responding to too many of the following claims all at once:

- The school Booster club needs help, and you are nominated.
- Your friends ask you to go to the lake, or to a sporting event.
- A local civic organization asks you to join, reminding you of all the good they do.
- The scouts are desperate for another leader; unless one is found; your child's group will have to be discontinued.
- You sign your child up for every weekend sporting team available.

- You just learned someone at work is retiring, and a manager's position will open up. Someone is needed who has no problem working longer hours, taking on extra projects and shows lots of enthusiasm. It could be you.

Then, as you face all these choices and more, you glance at that picture of your family in front of you. Your children are growing so fast. Your spouse, though only joking, suggests that she has to make an appointment to see you. Does your family really have legitimate claims on you and your time? Or should they just understand? Should they just understand everything your doing is all for them? It's all about them. Right? Riiight? Maybe we need to take a second look at this situation. Maybe it's not just about them; maybe it's about us as well.

Take heart dad, moms you're included as well; there is help in the Scriptures. In Matthew 14 following the feeding of the 5000 there are four important words we should note in verse 22: "*Jesus dismissed the crowd.*" This wasn't just any crowd. This was a crowd of over an estimated 10,000 people who had just heard Jesus teach, who had seen Him heal the sick, and who had watched Him produce enough food miraculously to feed them all.

This crowd was ready to make Him king, but suddenly Jesus dismissed them! Why? Verse 23 tells us: *“After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray.”*

Jesus said no to a great opportunity in order to say yes to a better one. Jesus made a deliberate choice to honor His priorities. Jesus’ first responsibility was not to satisfy a lust for promotion and/or power; His responsibility was not to satisfy crowd, but rather His responsibility was to be faithful to His heavenly Father. Jesus made a judgment call. He chose to retreat from the crowd and pray. He chose to step back from His hectic life and slow down to be with His Father.

Jesus made a judgment call, He made a decision. Do you know what happens physically to you when you make a judgment or decision? The part of the brain which is responsible for making judgments is located in the front or middle of your forehead. When you make a judgment blood flows in higher concentration to the middle of your forehead.

Remember the commercial, “I could’a had a V-8?” Where do they hit the head? In the front. But now, here is the amazing part, when you pray, I mean really pray, not just some rote repeating of a makeshift

prayer, but really pray there is a higher concentration of blood in the front of the forehead. The same part of the brain responsible for judgment is the same part for prayer. Could God be trying to tell us something?

As fathers decide what is important they, we, need to look at the cargo with which we have been entrusted. Our children, spouses, and friends gifts God has blessed us with, as such, we should place them in front of every decision we make. When we attempt to do for our families do we focus all our energies and attention on them and only them, or are our energies and attention towards them tossed out like firecrackers, only making noise and not really accomplishing very much?

Did you know there is approximately the same amount of gunpowder in a firecracker as in a bullet? The difference being the firecracker is unfocused. It just makes a big noise and accomplishes very little. The bullet, on the other hand, focuses that same power in a specific direction and delivers an enormous punch. You can be a firecracker Christian or a bullet Christian. It's all a matter of focus. Paul was highly focused, a bullet Christian, if you will. He declared, "*I press toward the mark for the high call of God in Christ Jesus.*"

Fathers, regardless of whether or not your children are grown; we have a choice to either be a firecracker parent or a bullet parent. One who makes a lot of noise, or one who hits the mark and sees results! It's a matter of focus. On this Father's Day, let me suggest a couple of things which may help fathers, mothers, grandparents, and individuals focus on healthy priorities.

A father's role is as a role model, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Dads communicate their values by what they say and/or don't say; by what they praise and/or by what they condemn; by what they focus on and/or by what they ignore, but even more powerfully by the way they live. Our children, more to the point most children listen to our every word, watch our every action, and draw their own conclusions.

A dad had to go and pick up his five-year-old son from kindergarten and then quickly chose to run several errands on the way home. He was in a big hurry and driving way too fast. When he saw the policeman's blue light flashing behind him he cried out. Now, he was not only angry, but he was totally frustrated. He pulled over and while he searched for his license and registration, he heard his son's voice from the backseat saying, "Daddy, he doesn't look like a fat pig to me."

Our children hear everything we say. We are role models for them constantly, everyday no time off. They follow our leading. If we show disinterest they show disinterest. If we are focused they will be focused.

If you mutter racial slurs as you listen to the evening news, your children will form conclusions about people of other races. If your children hear you use God's name carelessly or profanely, they will draw conclusions both about God and your relationship with God. None of us are perfect. We sometimes show our worst sides before our children. It's very important, at such times, to acknowledge our failings honestly and ask them for forgiveness. When was the last time we actually apologized to our children? Not for not giving and fulfilling their every wanton desires, but for missing the mark by being a poor example? It's all about our focus; remember bullet, straight and on target, not just an insignificant loud noise.

Another point to remember is, nothing can, is, or ever will be a substitute for our presence. Many parents, specifically fathers justify their absence by saying, "I don't spend as much time with my children as I should, but what we have is quality time." A first-grader asked his mother why his Dad brought home a briefcase full of stuff each night.

She explained that he had so much work to do that he couldn't get it all done at the office so he brings it home to finish. The youngster thought about this to himself, and then asked, "Well, why don't they put him in a slower group."

Fathers remember this. If you can't say no to some things, your life will soon fade away and your children as well. In a meeting one afternoon a man in the group raised his hand and said, "Mr. Chairman, I know what we are doing is important, but I must leave at 5:00 PM sharp. My son's Little League game starts at 5:30 and I promised him I would be there." Everybody around the table beamed with admiration over this man's apparent devotion to his son. Here was a man who could say no when something more important required a yes. But this same man made little to no effort to be present for and/or with his son at church events. Children notice, they see what you consider important, and what you don't. If fathers, mothers, grandparents, Christians; if we make church an after thought, the same will be true for them. If they see you arriving late most weeks and/or leaving without ever fellowshipping you teach them worship is really not important.

Or worse if they see you not focusing at all, checking your phone, working on your checkbook, talking, or sleeping they will eventually do the same. As fathers, as parents we need to focus, not only for ourselves, but for our children. A focused shot or loud noise!

Finally, no one can lead a child to God better than a parent. If the parents fail to lead their child to God, chances are drastically reduced that a grandparent, friend, or church can make up that deficit. Children are very bright. If they sense that the Bible is not a vitally important book in your life, chances are it won't be in theirs.

If they seldom, if ever see you pray, except for a quick and meaningless prayer at meal-time, they will not take prayer seriously either. If children sense that Sunday worship is a duty rather than a treasured privilege, they will stop attending as soon as they get a chance. Some have already stopped attending, many children today are given the option of attending church or not. A focused shot or loud noise!

I know a father who enrolled his children in every soccer league he could, he signed them up for all the elite leagues, and paid considerable amounts of money, traveled with them throughout most of the southern states just to play soccer, but he failed to bring them to Sunday School,

and when he did they were always late, and Sunday School is free. One day God may ask this man, “Why did you care more about your children playing games than about their relationship with me?”

I was talking to our son Kevin the other day and it caused me to recall some wonderful family vacation experiences. One year while at Sunset Beach NC it was about 7:00 AM when I woke everyone and proposed that we find a church and attend worship. Kevin and his mother were none too thrilled by the idea, considering our informal dress, and the time, but I insisted. We ended up attending a church service on the beach and it was great. Kevin loved attending church on the beach. Isn't it strange that some 25 years later he still remembers that day? My prayer is Kevin is doing the same for his children as well.

Fathers, mothers, grandparents, and friends our primary mission is not just to win a race, but to faithfully care for those persons God entrusted to us, our family. Bless the focused, those who know their priorities and honor them. Dads, today is your day, what better time to switch from being a firecracker to a bullet. What better time to focus on what we do and why we do it. Parents, grandparents, friends, it is our responsibility to make disciples for Jesus Christ; we are commanded to

do so. Children, young and old see how important God is in our lives, the question is, is He, is He really important? Focus, take aim, fire like a bullet, and let God lead you. But you can't do that as a firecracker all you'll do is make a loud noise and be gone.