

Three Things Every Child Needs From His Dad

By Rick Boyer

The Apostle Paul was a great one to use illustrations in explaining the Christian life to his children in Christ. One of the most fascinating examples of this gives us insight not only into spiritual parenthood but also speaks volumes about the role of us earthly fathers. It is from Paul's words in I Thessalonians 2:11 that I draw the following article, which I call "Three Things Every Child Needs From His Dad"

The text says, "As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father *doth* his children." There are three fatherly functions in a nutshell. To exhort, to comfort, and to charge. Paul reminds his spiritual children how he has ministered to them and uses a natural father as an illustration. So what can we dads learn from that will help us in the trenches? Let's look at each point in the job description:

First, Paul says that a dad *exhorts* his children. This English word comes from the Greek *parakaleo*, which literally means to call alongside. The noun form of the word is used several times in reference to God the Holy Spirit, which speaks volumes. Dads are to call their children alongside to do for them in the natural realm things that only the Holy Spirit can do in the spiritual realm. As the Holy Spirit instructs us, we should instruct our children. As He reproves us, we should reprove our children.

But the thing that jumps out at me from *parakaleo* is that idea of calling alongside. As the father of fourteen

kids and the owner of two businesses, I'm familiar with the wide variety of pressures that can distract a man from in-depth communication with his children. It's just not easy to be sensitive to the needs of others, even your children, when there are needs in your own life (a need for a nap, as an example). But isn't it a neat thought: Your child alongside you. Not facing you, as he might be in a situation of correction. Not behind you, though the idea of following your leadership is great too. But alongside, looking in the same direction. You get the idea of facing the future together, being a team. Focusing on the same goal. There's a closeness, an intimacy in the picture of a dad and son or daughter so close that they can hear each other say things no one else is privy to. An easy position from which to place a reassuring arm around a shoulder. Or even to give a nudge forward if it's called for. And as the Holy Spirit is the great Encourager, it's in that side-by-side position, perhaps, that it's easiest to visualize a dad urging his child on, "Sure you can do it! Get on out there and be a better man than I ever was! Go on and cast down fortresses for God!" Side by side. It takes time, but what better use is there for time?

Second, Paul says that like an earthly father he had *comforted* his children. Comfort here is translated pretty accurately from an unpronounceable Greek word meaning to comfort, encourage or console. In the KJ Bible, it's always translated as comfort. The emphasis here is on the dad's sympathy with his child's emotional needs. I've found this to be very challenging. If

Dad's spiritual gift is ruling and the child's gift is teaching, Dad may get very impatient trying to get things done while his beloved child spends what seems like excessive time giving attention to details. Or if Dad has the melancholic temperament and thinks in terms of perfection, while Junior is a sanguine and thinks in terms of having a good time, sparks can fly. What makes the situation even more colorful (read insane) is the fact that most of us have more than one child. And in home schooling circles, several children are the norm. So all we have to do is learn to empathize with a wife and three or five or a dozen kids. Reserve me a rubber room.

Again comes the refrain that it all takes time. But time is limited and we can't get more of it, so all we can do is pray for more sensitivity to our family members' needs and less to our own. We also have to study our children to learn their individual differences. My best help in this has been my wife. She's a mom, so she has invisible antennae that serve as need sensors. She also has a very different personality than mine (read normal) which gives her a different viewpoint automatically. More than once Marilyn has called my attention to how I've unknowingly or carelessly trampled on the feelings of a child. Gulp. I guess God put two parents in a family for the same reason we have two eyes. We have better depth perception and peripheral vision. We see deeper and in a broader perspective.

The third thing Paul says fathers do for their kids is to *charge* them. No, this doesn't mean the seventeen-year-old has to pay for his meals,

though that's a tempting thought. The Greek root word is *martureo*, from which we get our English word martyr. But the emphasis in Greek is not on the idea of sacrifice, but of testimony. It's most often translated to mean bear witness or testify. In short, it means to tell somebody else what we know from having seen it ourselves.

Here is surely one of the most valuable things a dad can ever do for his children, in teaching them what he's learned from his own experience. Experience, after all, is the main thing children lack. They have all kinds of natural and spiritual potential but living life takes practice and they haven't had time for much of that yet. And of course there are things they should never experience, and if Dad has been there even his negative experiences are valuable if he will use them to warn his children away from the pitfalls he once fell into. I've often said that if my kids just learn from my mistakes they could each have three PHD's. But positive or negative, Dad's life experience is a gold mine if he will take time to dig up the nuggets and pass them around. Dad has skills that took years to acquire. They need to be passed on. Dad has known people and gone places and done things to which his children are strangers. He has seen what actions bring joy and which bring disaster. Better for his children to know in advance and learn by precept before learning by experience.

Of course there are things they can only learn by living through them, but there are an awful lot of things that aren't that way. Experience is a great teacher, but her price is sometimes very high. I want my kids to get their education at the lowest price.

One of the tragedies of our day is the scattering of families geographically. Grandparents grow old and die without the opportunity to pass on their practical wisdom while young parents strive to reinvent the

wheel in training their children. If hindsight is always twenty-twenty, then we shouldn't be surprised if old people really have learned something from having raised their own children, even as they look back at where they could have done better. Maybe that's why Scripture so often commands us to teach things not only to our children, but to our children's children as well. So Dad has the opportunity to give the benefit of his life experience to more than one generation, at least if he is blessed with an average lifespan. As my grandchildren (all beautiful, by the way) are approaching a teachable age, I look forward to teaching them what I can. Meantime, I'm enjoying sharing what I have learned with my sons and daughters. Charging them with my experience. I'm glad they pay attention better than I did when my dad tried to teach me. They'll be better people.

A dad's job isn't easy, but who said it was supposed to be. The present payoff is great and the future dividends can't be measured. God give us all the willingness to be beside our kids, the sensitivity to know who they are and what they need, the insight to turn our life experience into a resource they will understand and treasure.

Rick and Marilyn Boyer are true pioneers of the home education movement. They began teaching the eldest of their fourteen children at home in 1980 and are still actively home schooling their three youngest children today. Rick will be the keynote speaker at the 2010 OCEANetwork Conference in June. Article reprinted with permission thelearningparent.com.

Visit www.oceanetwork.org for an up-to-date listing of events for home educators and find links to information about the 2010 Christian Home Education Conference & Graduate Recognition.

Songs for Saplings Concert

March 7, 2010, Salem

SACHSN (Salem Area Christian HomeSchool Network) is hosting a concert with "Songs for Saplings" at Salem First Baptist Church 395 Marion St. Salem, Oregon. Sunday March 7, 2010 at 6pm. Samples of the music can be heard at www.songsforsaplings.com.

Do Hard Things DVD Conference

March 13, Brookings

All home school families with youth ages 10-20 are invited to attend a "Do Hard Things" DVD Conference. Price is \$15 before Feb 27th, and \$20 before March 6th or at the door. For more information contact: Amy Ajimine at (541) 469-3525 or email her at: info@dohardthings.org.

Raising Kids to Do Hard Things Parenting Seminar

March 19-20

Portland

Homeschool pioneer and father of seven, Gregg Harris presents the simple but powerful approach he and his wife have taken to make their home a place for "raising kids to do hard things." In this fast-paced seminar attendees will learn what works... and what doesn't. For cost, registration and more information see: <http://dohardthingstogether.com>.

CCNW Debate Round Robin

Saturday Mar. 20

Beaverton

Team policy debate on the topic of federal income tax policy. There will be four debate rounds, two in the morning and two in the afternoon. Location: Southwest Hills Baptist Church 9100 SW 135th Ave. For more information contact Ray Engel at salemdebate@juno.com or see <http://www.ccnwdebate.org>.