

TEACHERS OR FATHERS?

“For though you might have ten thousand instructors (teachers) in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15).

Because it's Fathers Day I thought it would be appropriate to examine the character of a father as revealed in the Word of God. Our opening verse suggests that there are far too many people willing to instruct us in the things of God but very few who are inclined to father us. So what is the difference between a tutor and a father? The Greek word used here and translated “teacher” or “instructor” is literally “a trainer of boys.” It refers to the person in the household who exercised a general supervision of the child and was responsible for his or her moral or physical well-being. Technically this person was not the true “guardian” of the child because he was expected train but not to impart knowledge. The point that the apostle Paul was making is that there are far too many teachers but too few pastors (leaders with a father's heart). Note the difference... A trainer or teacher can freely supervise; provide instruction in moral matters and even assist in the child's physical development. However, he could not impart knowledge, and he should not discipline the child because this role was reserved for the father.

We see this clearly in the character of God. There are many avenues by which we can obtain certain skills and abilities, but only God the Father can impart “knowledge of the Truth” to us. In other words, there is no revelation knowledge except that which is released and revealed by the Spirit of God the Father. And in the context of the church, the role of the pastor is to do the same - under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If you want to know who has a father's heart, measure the truth and knowledge you have received from him. Anyone can train you up!

Through repetition most people can become skilful at something. But this is not a father's duty - although he can be involved in it should he wish to. Training, instruction and supervision are definitely part of the role of bring up a child, but it is "knowledge of the truth" that will set him or her free to become the man or woman God has created them to be. Fathers, when was the last time you sat down with your child and imparted knowledge concerning the Word of Truth? Being a teacher is good, but anyone can teach your child something! However, only you can impact on him or her spiritually - only you can help them to develop and grow in the things of God. You are the "pastor" in the home! The word pastor is derived from the word "shepherd" and in this we can find many other attributes a godly father should have. Namely:

- To love
- To feed
- To protect
- To guide
- To discipline
- To value

Here are ten characteristic of a good shepherd:

1. The shepherd is patient with his sheep

Have you noticed how sheep always take their time when doing things? Have you ever seen a shepherd helping his sheep cross a country road? Well, as a father you need to do the same with those in your care. Don't get frustrated and angry just because they are not doing things quickly enough.

2. The shepherd knows his sheep

I have to be honest, despite years of looking at sheep, they still all look the same to me. Yet, I could walk through a field with a shepherd and he would probably know the names and even the characters of each one. He would know the scrapes they had been in and the number of times he had to rescue them. As a father you should study and know each of your children. How well do you really know your child? How much time have you set aside to get to know him or her better?

3. The shepherd loves his sheep

The shepherd does not just value his sheep as if they were units of economic production. He loves them; and not just as a collective, but as individuals. He does not just have loving feelings but takes loving actions. The father may find it easier to love one child. But what about the rebellious one? What about the one that challenges your authority at every opportunity. Godly fathers do not have favourites, fathers love their children the same - with the same commitment to each of them.

4. The shepherd observes his sheep

A shepherd can detect the smallest difference in his sheep. He can sense problems long before they fully develop. He sees a sheep in an unusual spot in the field. He sees a change in its posture or eating habits. And he takes action! The good father will develop these powers of acute and careful observation as well. He will develop an instinct for problems in his children's lives. He senses a different expression on the face, a different posture, a change in vocal tone, and he may not be able to put his finger upon it, but he senses that something is wrong. Yet often, all it takes is a few wise questions and all is revealed. Are you an observant father?

5. The shepherd feeds his sheep

Hungry sheep are unhappy sheep. The shepherd knows the best fields to take his sheep at different times of the year. He knows when they need particular kinds of grass. He knows when water is needed to refresh and reinvigorate his flock. The apostle Peter had a passion for feeding the flock of God, and we know where he got that from. Fathers, besides putting food on the table, make sure your children are well fed spiritually.

6. The shepherd leads his sheep

In Western cultures, the shepherd follows behind the sheep, and directs the sheep with dogs. But in the East it was the custom for shepherds to go before the sheep, to break up the way, to clear paths of danger, to take the safest path. He leads them beside the still waters, in straight paths, through the darkest valley. Too many fathers have embraced the Western model of shepherding when it comes to leadership. They follow their children rather than lead them. A godly father should be out in front of his family being aware of any danger and plotting the next course, etc.

7. The shepherd speaks well of his sheep

A word of warning, don't ever criticize or mock sheep in front of their shepherd! The good father should make it a policy to speak well of his children. If someone criticises one of them, he should leap to his or her defence and point out the good. When he is outside of the home and is asked about his children, the father should reply with words of affection and appreciation. Fathers, learn to build up your children and give them praise at every opportunity.

8. The shepherd pursues his sheep

When a sheep is straying, the shepherd does not say, "O well, I'm sure it will be ok." No, he seeks until he finds it. No matter how far away, no matter how foolish the sheep has been, no matter how frequent his straying, the shepherd goes after it. As the father your responsibility is to try to stop your children from straying, however, the chances are that at some time or another one of them will stray. When that happens, don't back off and hope for the best, pursue that child and do whatever it takes to get him back. You must take full responsibility for a child that's gone astray!

9. The shepherd rests his sheep

Just before the winter starts, a shepherd goes out into the moors and mountains to gather his flocks. Sometimes it takes a few days to drive them to their winter shelter. But he never chases them or pushes them beyond their limits. He knows when they need a rest. Likewise, a good father should know that there are seasons when rest and refreshment are needed for his family. Fathers, stop thinking about how much you need a rest and start to think of whether your children need to be refreshed.

10. The shepherd perseveres with his sheep

There are days when a shepherd feels exhausted, discouraged, frustrated and unappreciated, and he is tempted to give up. However, the good shepherd patiently perseveres. Fathers, never give up on your family - never give up on your child! Whatever it takes - it is worth it!

Lord make us to be good shepherds (fathers) today, according to your promise: ***"Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding"*** (Jeremiah 3:15).