

## Fathers & the Fatherless in Biblical Education

by Tom Garfield, Logos School

“And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

The above verse is often used by Christian educators, and rightly so, to demonstrate God’s view of the *kind* of instruction children are supposed to receive, that is, a completely God-centered one. What isn’t pointed out often enough from this verse is to *whom* the imperative is given, that is, the father. I know it isn’t pointed out enough because so many fathers, even in evangelical circles, have ignored the application of this clear teaching. To be fair, many fathers do consider this verse, but believe they are doing this adequately by regularly taking their families to church. The application is far more encompassing.

Years ago I had a conference with a mom who was agonizing over whether or not to have her child repeat a grade. She was asking my advice on what factors she should consider in making this tough decision. Instead of spending much time on answering her immediate questions, I told her as diplomatically as possible that this decision which was weighing on her so heavily was not hers to make; it was her *husband’s*. At first I was concerned that I may have offended her, but instead I had the joy of almost visibly seeing a burden fall from her shoulders. She was still understandably concerned for her child, but obviously had more peace knowing that indeed it

was her husband’s decision, and, being the good father he is, he would gladly assume that decision.

Unfortunately, that type of father is all too rare in the broader Christian community, not to mention our general American culture. It hasn’t always been so, as evidenced by this excerpt from

little one starts kindergarten, it’s often mom who sheds the tears and diligently scrutinizes every aspect of the school’s instruction over those first critical years. As I’ve mentioned to many people, I would rather meet with a concerned dad vs. a concerned mom any day; I call it the “Mother Bear

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the Little House series: “Slowly and weightily, Pa said, ‘Miss Wilder, we want you to know that the school board stands with you to keep order in this school.’ He looked sternly over the whole room. ‘All you scholars must obey Miss Wilder, behave yourselves, and learn your lessons. We want a good school, and we are going to have it.’

“When Pa spoke like that, he meant what he said, and it would happen.” (*Little Town On the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder.)

I don’t know if Mrs. Laura Wilder was a Christian, but her father was certainly recognized as the authority for his children’s education. American history shows us that he was not unique or unusual in his assuming of that role.

God designed mothers to be the nurturers to their children, and as such, they naturally take a very active part in their children’s education. Moms typically feel the “nest-leaving” far more deeply than do the dads. When that first

Syndrome.” Nevertheless, having designed mothers that way, God still insists that dads take the lead in the education of their children.

How is this to be done? First, it means recognizing that it is the God-ordained role of a father to take the responsibility for his children’s welfare and education. This will likely mean some type of delegation of tasks, but the responsibility cannot be averted. Dad should be at every formal parent-teacher conference. He needs to know what his kids are studying and how well they’re doing. (Our four children were in Logos over a span of twenty-one years so I know how hard it is just to look at all their papers each night.) All problems in school, academic and disciplinary, should receive top priority by Dad. And a “well done!” from Dad should be frequent and meaningful.

At the same time, we live in a fallen world and even in Christian contexts hard providences come; not every family has a dad around to take the lead. This can be the result of a death of a beloved father (as we have experienced),

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divorce (all too often), or even young single mothers.

Sometime during our fourth or fifth year as a struggling little Christian school, I got a unique phone call from Pastor Jim Wilson, a wonderful patriarch of the faith, and a long-time friend, asking me if we would consider enrolling a pregnant young lady. Right away. There was a high-school-aged young woman who lived not too far away and was facing a serious dilemma. Being pregnant during this Dark Age of abortion, she was trying to decide whether to quit school or kill her baby. She was leaning toward the latter since she wanted to finish school but didn't want to face the embarrassment of having her friends watch her "expand," so to speak.

How Jim knew the family of this girl I don't recall, but it didn't matter; Santa Claus knows fewer people than Jim Wilson! He wanted to let this family know that there would be a way for this girl to have her schooling and keep her baby, too. She would move to Moscow and attend Logos until the baby was born, which was at least a good six months away.

What other answer could I give but a hearty yes?! I didn't have to consult the school board, I knew what they'd say, but I got their assurance just the same. The tricky part was going to be informing the other students and their families—particularly the younger ones who were as yet a bit clueless about how these things happen, if you follow me. I wanted all the students to accept this young lady lovingly and respectfully. At the same time, I didn't want them to think that this situation was normal and fine.

So, before the young lady came, I let the parents know and asked

them to support us by talking to their children about how to treat her. I then went to the classrooms and told the kids the essentials: a pregnant girl was coming to attend our school. I said she had sinned by not being married before she had a baby but God says that babies are always a gift from Him. We were all to love her and help her through this difficult time.

The kids and staff couldn't have done better by this girl than they did during the time she was with us. In fact, the older girls were so supportive and kind I admit I was privately a bit worried, especially when the baby finally came and they all visited their new friend in the hospital, showering her with gifts and attention. All their natural and good instincts to love babies came out but I didn't want them to think this was as joyful and right an occasion as it should have been, within a covenant blessed by God. I didn't say anything and was gratified that my concerns were groundless as time went by.

In fact, within the next few years, there were two more young women in similar circumstances who came to us to be educated and loved through their pregnancies. We were happy to accept them both (thankfully they came at different times).

A God-centered education must deal with ALL of life, not just the "academic" side, if there is such a thing. God gave us life in all its complexities and nuances, from messy birth to hard-edged death, and He sustains us throughout. That message should be coming through to our students loud and clear each day, certainly from their families, as well as in each of our classrooms, no matter what grade or subject.

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classical Christian school should have as part of its culture the resolve and means to encourage all its fathers to fulfill their biblical role. This resolve shows up, for instance, in how the discipline policy is followed, contacting dad first. And these fathers, by raising children with a down-to-the-ground view of how a family is to work, will have children who are a blessing to others. Those "others" will likely include children with single mothers who are also seeking to raise godly children in tough circumstances. In short, the scriptural mandate of caring for widows and the fatherless is very appropriate to these situations.

A vast number of problems, from behavioral to academic, that we currently experience in our schools (yes, even in classical Christian ones) could be dispelled if fathers assumed their God-given privileges and responsibilities toward their precious sons and daughters. Pray for and encourage those fathers you know who are doing the right thing.