

INTRODUCTION:

This evening, I would like for us to go back to our high school biology classes or back to zoology in college, and I would like for us to try to remember what admirable quality is common to marmosets, siamangs, sea horses, and jacanas.

- Marmosets are squirrel-sized monkeys.
- Siamangs are members of the ape family.
- Seahorses aren't really horses.
- And jacanas are robin-sized wading birds, sometimes called “**lily trotters**” because their long toes allow them to walk across water on lily pads.
- What do these four animals have in common?
- The answer I am looking for is this: The male of each of these species is responsible for taking care of its young!

This evening, I would like for us to consider a passage from **1 Thessalonians 2**—a passage that has a tremendous lesson for those of us who are fathers.

- Just from looking at the world around us, we know that being a father is a huge responsibility.
- In fact, you can go to the website of the USDA, and you can find their annual report on the expenses involved in raising a child from birth to 18 in our current economy.
- In the year 2003, the figure for a middle-income family (with an average pre-tax income of \$54,100), for raising a child from birth to 18 years old, is **\$178,590**.
- For our benefit, they have broken that figure down by category. The cost of **housing that child is \$60,120**, the cost of **food during that time is \$30,750**, **transportation—\$25,110**, **clothing—\$9,960**, **healthcare, \$13,230**, **childcare and education—\$19,800**, and **\$19,620 for “miscellaneous”**—as I see it, that is money that simply disappears!
- We all know how easily and how quickly that can happen!
- None of these figures, by the way, include anything for a college education, which now averages around **\$9,000** per year for a public school and **\$24,000** per year for a private college or university.
- The point is... it is a tremendous responsibility to bring up a child in our modern economy.

Before we get too discouraged and give up (as many fathers have already done), I should point out that fathers obviously do much more than help provide the finances.

- Fathers are able to give a sense of firmness and direction, which is different, as a whole, from the tenderness and compassion that is provided by a mother.
- The roles of father and mother certainly overlap at times, and yet we also understand that there is a distinct value to having both roles uniquely filled in each family.

I recently read about the results of a study that was done concerning a father's “rough and tumble” actions with kids.

- This study showed the unique role that this plays in the development of babies and young children.
- During a number of videotaped play sessions with fathers and their babies, the study found that fathers were more likely to throw their kids up in the air and pelt them in the face with foam blocks—not something that the mothers were ever recorded doing—and yet the kids loved it, and the study found that that kind of rough play was a valuable part of the children's development.
- Other studies have shown that children would rather play with their fathers than with anything else in their lives—whether it is wrestling on the floor, riding their dad like a horse, or playing outside.

- But so many fathers are gone so much of the time that the raising of children falls almost completely on the mother.

Even in the animal kingdom, there is evidence that there is a positive influence that comes from mature males in the family.

- A few years ago, 60 Minutes reported that park rangers in South Africa had found that young male elephants were going around like gangs killing rhinos—39 of them were slaughtered by these “teenage” elephants.
- The rangers were forced to remove the leader of this “elephant gang” in order to stop the violence.
- They attributed this uncharacteristic behavior to the fact that about 10 years earlier they had been forced to remove all of the mature males due to overpopulation.
- The problem was ultimately resolved by bringing in a dominant adult male that was able to keep the young males in check.

This evening, though, let’s go back to **1 Thessalonians 2** and consider a time when Paul talked about being a kind of spiritual father to the church in Thessalonica.

- We remember that Paul established the church there on his 2nd Missionary Journey in **Acts 17**, he taught there for three weeks, and had a tremendous impact on the lives of people in that town.
- However, the Jewish leaders were opposed to Paul, and because of their violence against him, Paul had to leave and go on to the next town.
- But the church was established and remained faithful for many years.

In **1 Thessalonians 2**, Paul was thinking back about the time he first spent in Thessalonica, and how they should follow his own leadership style in the church.

- It is interesting that Paul compared his behavior to that of a good father. [**1 Thessalonians 2:9-12**]

9 *For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.*

10 *You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;*

11 *just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,*

12 *so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

As we look back over these verses, we start to see a portrait of what it means to be a good father.

I. First of all, we find that A FATHER IS TO START BY SETTING A CHRISTIAN EXAMPLE IN HIS OWN LIFE.

In Paul’s case, we see in **verses 9-10** that during that 3-week period when the church was established, he worked hard day and night—at no expense to the congregation, and he was also completely upright and blameless in his own behavior.

- With that in mind, we certainly understand that human fathers also need to think more about setting the right example for their own children.
- A father’s example is one of the greatest factors when it comes to children being faithful to the Lord later in life.

Some time ago, I read the results of a survey about this, and the survey reflected what we all know to be true. Here are some of the conclusions that were made:

1. If your parents worshiped with you regularly while you were growing up, chances are 80% that you will worship God regularly, too.
2. If only your mother worshiped regularly with you, chances are only 30% that you will worship regularly as an adult.
3. However, if your father worshiped regularly with you as a child, chances are still 70% that you will continue to worship regularly as an adult.

This is not to cut on a mother's influence, but it certainly shows the importance of a father setting the proper example in the family.

- As fathers, then, we need to ask ourselves the question: When we are gone, what will we be leaving our children?
- Will we leave them some money, or a house, or maybe a garage full of tools, or perhaps a skill—maybe the ability to repair cars, or the ability to plant a garden, or the ability to build a house?
- These are all very important! However, the greatest thing we can leave our children is the ability for them to say, **“My dad was a faithful Christian.”**

We can look to the scriptures, and we find several good examples of fathers who took their position seriously and were able to see their families become faithful children of God.

- For example, we can look to Joshua in the Old Testament. In **Joshua 24:14-15**, Joshua said, *“Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*
- We also have the example of Cornelius in the New Testament.
- In **Acts 10**, Peter preached the gospel, and at the end of that sermon, Cornelius and his family were baptized.
- Cornelius, as the father in that family, led them in obeying the gospel.
- And so we learn that both Joshua and Cornelius led their families by example.
- We can do the same thing in our lives today as fathers—as our children see us reading from the Scriptures, as they see us leading prayers in the home, and as they see us living with integrity—not just on Sunday, but on every day of the week.

II. As we move along in **1 Thessalonians 2**, we find that Paul not only led by example, but we see in **verse 11** that **PAUL WAS ALSO IN THE HABIT OF EXHORTING THE CONGREGATION—JUST AS A FATHER WOULD EXHORT HIS OWN CHILDREN.**

The NASB, the NKJV, and the ESV all use the word *“exhort.”* The NIV uses the word *“encourage.”* The NRSV uses the word *“urge.”*

- The definition of the word itself is this: **“to incite by argument or advice, to urge strongly.”**
- In other words, Paul was like a father to the church in Thessalonica in that he exhorted them in the word of the Lord.
- He encouraged them to remain faithful to the word of God. He exhorted them to follow the Lord.
- His goal in life was to instruct his children in the Lord's word.

As fathers, we can think about our responsibility today, and we understand that our job is the same.

- Not only are we to set a good example, but our job goes much further than that.
- We are to *“exhort”* our children. As Paul said in **Ephesians 6:4**, *“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*
- The Lord has given us as fathers the special assignment of training our children in the ways of God.

- Can a mother train her children in the Lord? Certainly she can.
- Many of us received instruction in the Bible from our mothers.
- We remember the young preacher Timothy who was raised by a godly mother and grandmother.
- The Bible says that they taught him the “*Scriptures*.”

But we see here that the father is the one who is primarily responsible for making sure that the gospel is faithfully passed on from one generation to the next.

- It is significant that the instruction in **Deuteronomy 6** was specifically given to the fathers:

4 *“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!*

5 *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*

6 *“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.*

7 *You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.*

8 *“You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.*

9 *“You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

As fathers, how long has it been since we prayed for each member of our family?

- How long has it been since we have studied the Bible with our children?
- How long has it been since we provided our children with evidence of God?
- How long has it been since we have told them a Bible story at bedtime?

Certainly none of us as fathers would abandon our children financially, but there are many fathers who have abandoned the spiritual leadership of their own families.

- Who is teaching our children to pray?
- Who is showing them the difference between right and wrong?
- Who is bringing them to Bible class and worship?
- Many times, those duties are passed off to the wife and mother, when the father is the one who is ultimately responsible.
- Paul, therefore, is saying that the father is responsible for exhorting his children in the word of God.

III. There is a third quality Paul points out here in this portrait of a good father, and that is, **A GOOD FATHER WILL ENCOURAGE HIS CHILDREN.**

The NASB, of course, uses the word “*encourage*,” as does the ESV. The NKJV and the NIV both use the word “*comfort*.” In other places, the word is also translated as “*console*.”

- We know what it means to “*encourage*” or “*console*” our children.
- It literally means, “*to speak beside someone.*”
- We know what it means to call someone to our side, and put our arm around them, and speak to them in a loving way.
- Paul said that he did this for the church in Thessalonica, just as a good father would do it for his own children.
- We know that some fathers can come on too strong with their children, and they can quench their spirit and discourage them.
- As a man, a father has great strength and power, but there is a place for being gentle with our children.
- There is a place for consoling them and encouraging them with our words.

Various studies have found that the average parent is giving his or her child approximately 96% negative attention and only 4% positive attention.

- In other words, most of our time communicating with our children comes from saying, “**Hurry up. Brush your teeth. Put that down. Clean up that mess. Make your bed. Where’s your homework. Don’t hurt your brother,**” and so on.
- And yet the studies continue to say that children need to be believed in by someone who loves them with unconditional love.
- A father is able to look into his children and he is able to see what they might become, and he can then very gently encourage them to reach those goals.

In terms of encouragement, nothing beats wrestling with them in the living room or at the lake!

- There are a hundred other things that you are probably doing in your own families, but I think Paul would encourage us to keep on encouraging our children—as the word literally means, calling them to our side and taking the time to be with them, as we should.
- It seems that Paul would probably agree with what was recently found on a church sign: “**Fathers—a son’s first hero, a daughter’s first love.**” It is very important that we encourage our children.

IV. There is a fourth aspect of this portrait of a good, Christian father, and that is, **A FATHER IS ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLORING HIS CHILDREN.**

The NRSV uses the word “*pleading*.” The ESV uses the word “*charged*.” The NIV uses the word “*urging*.”

- The word literally means, “**to beseech, to call or pray for earnestly, to entreat.**”
- My understanding is that Paul had to correct the congregation from time to time.
- In fact, the purpose of **1 Thessalonians** was to correct a serious misunderstanding that they had about the Second Coming of Christ.
- Apparently, some of them thought that Jesus was going to return in the next few days, so some of them had quit their jobs and were (as we might say) “**mooching**” off of the church.
- In fact, in his next letter, Paul had to correct them quite severely.
- Paul said in **2 Thessalonians 3:10-12**, “*For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.*”
- Paul had to be very straightforward at times—imploring, charging, and urging them to change their behavior.

Certainly we know today that fathers will need to discipline their children.

- Many times, this word gets a bad reputation.
- It is normally used in a negative sense, and yet the word literally refers to teaching someone something.
- It certainly can refer to physical punishment, but there are definitely other ways to enforce the rules in a family as well—maybe by withholding privileges or assigning more chores.
- Whatever form it might take, though, we know that discipline is a process that takes a lot of patience over a long period of time.

In the Bible, we have several examples of parents who did not discipline their children as they should have done.

- First on that list would probably be Eli.
- He was basically a good man, he was basically a good judge of the nation, but he was a complete failure when it came to teaching and restraining his own children.
- To a certain extent, we can say the same thing about Samuel.

- Samuel was a good man and did a lot of good in Israel, and yet Samuel also failed to discipline his sons as he should have done.
- In fact, his sons were so bad that the people demanded a king—they did not want any more judges—after the disasters of Eli and Samuel in raising their children.
- And yet we know that the failures did not stop with the judges.
- We can think about King David.
- David was also a great man, but apparently he wasn't a great father.
- David's children are remembered for rape, murder, and rebellion.

SUMMARY:

- First of all, then, we have learned that as Christian fathers, we are to set a good example.
- Secondly, we are to exhort our children—That is, we are to instruct them in the word of God.
- Thirdly, we are to encourage our children—we are to call them to our side with words of encouragement.
- And finally, we learn here in **1 Thessalonians 2** that we are to implore our children—We are to correct them when it becomes necessary to do so.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

We can look at the world around us, and we see that the importance of fathers is not always appreciated.

- There may be some men who will look at that figure of \$178,590, and they will wonder if it is worth it to be a father.
- Those of us who are fathers know that it is!

I would like to close with the words of a poem that was written in honor of fathers:

*Mender of toys, leader of boys,
Changer of fuses, kisser of bruises,
Bless him, O Lord.*

*Hanger of screens, counselor of teens,
Fixer of bikes, chastiser of tykes,
Help him, O Lord.*

*Mover of couches, soother of ouches,
Hammerer of nails, teller of tales,
Reward him, O Lord.*

*Raker of leaves, cleaner of eaves,
Dryer of dishes, fulfiller of wishes,
Bless him, O Lord.*

This evening, we may have fathers here who have not obeyed the gospel, and the message from Paul is, as long as a person lives, it is never too late to make a change.

- God, as our Father in Heaven, has given up His own Son as a sacrifice for our sins.
- We react to that sacrifice with faithful obedience to the word of God.
- The Bible tells us to change our lives and be immersed in water so that our sins can be forgiven.
- If you would like to take this step, and lead your family as you should, you can let us know by coming to the front as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...