

Podcast 233 Fathers and Kidz part 4

God the Father and Jesus the Son work together joyfully. Jesus' burden is light. His commands are doable. He is humble and gentle.

We're doing part four of our discussion for dads. I feel a little funny in one sense because I've been doing dads talks off and on for years, and I don't want to duplicate the messages, but these are the kind of things I think about all the time. When I was out for my walk last night, I was thinking about this verse, "The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.'" (Exodus 34:6)

I did a little research, and discovered these words appear in Exodus and Numbers, when speaking through Moses. Nehemiah uses almost the same words to describe God. David uses similar descriptions in four Psalms. Joel and Jonah quote similar words.

Jonah said, "'O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.'" (Jonah 4:2)

What touched my heart is that from Moses to Jonah, over a period of hundreds of years, they had meditated on God's word, and they all knew this was the character of the God that they served. As I was walking, I was meditating. I usually meditate on some character quality of God, and instead, I chose this verse, and I started off with just thinking, "What does it mean to be abounding in steadfast love?" I was thinking of a waterfall or spring springing up just gushing or abounding just as God gushes with steadfast love.

He's not hoarding it. He's not a miser, but he's got so much love and faithfulness that He abounds in it. As I pondered on these character qualities, I thought, "I want to chew on these verses, and hopefully, convey the same spirit to my sons, and others that I come in contact with, my grandchildren, my wife. Maybe some day they would see me and say, 'You're merciful and gracious. You're slow to anger. You're abounding in steadfast love. You're faithful. Your quick to forgive.'" Wouldn't that be amazing to have these characteristics rub off of God onto us?

Let's pray.

Father, help us today as we consider ways that we can love our children well and convey to them and be a bridge to them of the love that you have for us. I pray that as we consider these characteristics that are yours that we'll be able to pass them on to our children in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're going to start with an edifying verse. I really like this short passage found in Matthew 11:28–30. Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you. Let Me teach you because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

The first thing that I want to think of in terms of being a dad is the nature of this teacher, Jesus, who was humble and gentle. I take a deep breath because I have not always been humble and gentle, especially when I was trying to finish a job or a task around the house. There was always a job to be done for we had bought a big house in the country that needed a lot of work. Just maintaining it would have been a lot of work, but we were also trying to make capital improvements, building retaining walls, fences, walkways, and decks.

This was back when we were also trying to get Math-U-See off the ground, so there was a lot on my plate. I would like to report that I was nice to work with, but this wasn't always the case. Then I remember Jesus who said, "Come to me, I am humble and gentle at heart, and you'll find rest for your souls."

Whew. May God help us as dads to be humble and gentle and approachable. That's what Jesus said. He said, "Come to me. You'll find rest when you hang out with me." The second thing he teaches is about His yoke. There are several lessons we can learn from this, but one of them is that His yoke is easy.

IN the past, whenever I hear a preacher speak of the yoke of Jesus they hold up a big yoke or a picture of a yoke and speak about Jesus being in the yoke and pulling side by side with us. We fix our eyes on the yoke. I heard some teaching that said that when Jesus was talking about his yoke, he was talking about his teaching or his message which was easy and doable, and how different it was from the Pharisees teaching, which was hard and unreasonable. The religious establishment had gone way beyond what God had written in the first place when He gave us the law on Sinai. They had added traditions and rules which were impossible to obey.

Jesus finally said to them, "You guys have created this huge burden. You can't do it yourself, and you've thrown away the key so nobody else can do it either." The Jews lived in a state of condemnation.

Jesus comes along and teaches, "My yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." Wow. Just love your neighbor as yourself. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. All those commandments that you're thinking about and chewing on and taking to the nth degree, are built on these two commands. The whole law and all that the prophets taught are based on: love God, love your neighbor. His yoke is easy to bear. The burden He gives is light. Now, how do I translate that to my children?

God has always said His teaching was doable. "This commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven,

that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it." (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

The first phrase, again, says, "This commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you," so God who created us and gave us this law said, "This is doable." Then in 1 John 5:3, John succinctly says, "This is the love of God that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome."

When Jesus came to restore and blow off the dust and clear the slate, so to speak, He said, "My yoke is easy. Let me teach you. The burden I give you is light. It's doable." He's being consistent with what God had said in the past, what God said through Christ, who is the fulfillment of the law, and what He said through His disciple John.

I am now asking myself, are the commandments that I'm passing on to my children doable? Am I giving them stuff to do that's too hard? That's probably what every parent wrestles with. There's a part of us that we want our children to be diligent, and we want them to learn how to start a job and finish a job. We want them to start an assignment and complete it. We want them to follow through. Every parent knows this.

On the other hand, we don't want to overwhelm them. We don't want to give them things to do that are way beyond their ability to do it because I think that falls into the category that we've already discussed that provokes them, or exasperates them, maybe it even discourages them. We want to make sure that our teaching is doable. We want to make sure that we've clearly articulated our expectations, and then we want to help them to follow through and do the job properly.

My kids are out of the home now. I'm looking back and realizing that we did give them chores to do, and they did have responsibility. But one day I was seeking to have a deeper conversation with my two oldest boys and learned that they were struggling. We had just had family devotions and I think the boys were 8 and 10. I said, "How are you doing?" and what do you think they said? I mean, they're boys. They said, "Fine."

I said, "Oh." It got kind of quiet, and I'm praying. I thought, this is supposed to be a conversation to develop our relationship, but I don't know what to do. I thought and then I said to them, "Would you like to know I'm doing?" They said, "Yes" as they sat up in their chair. I said, "Well, I'm a overwhelmed and depressed."

We were living in this big home that required a lot of work, and I didn't have the energy to finish it myself. And I didn't have money to pay somebody else to do it. And every day when I walked out and saw the unpainted floors and the tasks before me that I didn't have the energy to do, it was overwhelming.

Those little guys, they started telling me all the stuff that was overwhelming to them. Some of it was schoolwork. Some of it was they just felt like that the assignments that we'd given them as parents, they didn't know how they're going to finish it, and they were discouraged. They opened up and told me all kinds of stuff.

I was glad I had asked. But if I had said, "What's overwhelming?" probably nothing would have happened, but when I said, "This is how I'm feeling," I think a couple things happened that day. I think the first thing was they said, "Boy, Pop's got issues too." The second thing was, "And it's not our fault that he's feeling the way he is." After all, they're kids and they know when Mom and Dad are a little out of sorts, and so perhaps they were blaming themselves and wondering what they had done to cause me to be out of sorts. But this time they didn't have to wonder because I'd already confessed that it was my issues. It was the things that were on my plate. It had nothing to do with them or their attitudes.

Because I had been vulnerable and transparent, then they opened up, and we really had a sweet time of connecting. We were able to adjust their schedule, and make things more doable for them. It wasn't that they were lazy. They were a little overwhelmed. When I told them how I was feeling, it opened the door and created a nice atmosphere. This is the kind of humble spirit I'd like to convey during this podcast. Let's be approachable, humble, and gentle to our kids and give them an easy yoke and a light burden.

When Johnny was born with Down Syndrome, and then he had multiple surgeries during the first 10 months, we ran out of emotional and physical energy. We were shot. To top it off, we moved seven times in 14 months. I was not in a good place and felt like Humpty Dumpty inside. I was trying to hold myself together but was afraid of falling apart, and I didn't know what to do or who to turn to.

Thankfully I ran across this wonderful verse in Psalm 55:22 that says, "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved." The message that I received was that He won't let me fall apart. I realized that what I had been trying to do was bear my burdens by myself. I was not taking them to Jesus. I was not telling God how I was really doing because I was afraid I'd fall apart.

I read that verse, and saw it as a promise, that if I would let God carry my burdens, He would guarantee that I would not fall apart. I made an appointment to meet God the next Saturday. I set aside time and I went into my bedroom and locked the door. I knelt down by my bed, and just began to weep as I poured out my burdens and placed them in God's lap. That day I began to heal..

Thank God that he's got that big lap. When I read Matthew 11:28 to 30, I envision Jesus sitting alongside the road on a rock or under a tree. Maybe I've seen too many Sunday school paintings. And as He sits, He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

I found rest that day when I came to Him and let Him carry my burdens. Perhaps that's a good word for us is, Dads, we need to do this first. Let God carry our burdens, and then we'll know how to help our kids carry their burdens.

While we're talking about working together, I remember from Deuteronomy 6:7 where God says that we're supposed to teach our children diligently, and we're to do this while we sit in our house, walk by the way, lie down, and rise up. I sought to apply this principle by working together with my kids. We did lots of projects, together. This is not always the most efficient for any parent will tell you that it's usually easier just to do the work yourself. You're quicker, you're more efficient.

But how else are your kids going to learn unless you work alongside them? That's part of what we want to do as dads is teach our children how to fix a flat, how to jumpstart a car, how to hang sheet rock, paint, whatever. These are important skills to pass on to our children and do teach them, we need to work together.

I noticed this passage in John 5:16–19, where it says the “Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules, but Jesus replied, ‘My Father is always working, and so am I.’ So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill Him. For He not only broke the Sabbath, He called God His Father, thereby making Himself equal with God. So Jesus explained, ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself. He does only what He sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows Him everything He is doing.’”

I love the book of John for many reasons, but one of them is we have these glimpses into the relationship between the Heavenly Father and His Son, and the Son says, “Man, I keep my eyes on my Dad, and I like working with Him, and I only do what I see Him doing,” and the “Father loves the Son, and He shows him everything He is doing.” That's a beautiful picture.

Perhaps we need to bring our kids downstairs when we're paying our bills and say, “Hey, would you like to see what I do every couple of weeks? Here's the bills. Here's my checkbook.” “This is the stuff that I'm doing for our family, would you like to watch me?” The Father and the Son work together joyfully.

I think that we don't want to minimize the impact that we have just exemplifying a strong work ethic. When something needs to be fixed, we don't close the door and hope that it's going to fix itself. We go in there, and we pray, and we read some manuals, and we watch a YouTube video or two, and we figure this out. Then when that doesn't work, we call for help. When we do this, we're modeling how to work through processes.

There is another special insight into the relationship between the Father and the Son in Proverbs 8. I think when you read it, you can hear Jesus talking about He and His Dad working together at creation. “I was there when He established the Heavens, when He drew the horizon on the oceans. I was there when He set the

clouds above, when He established springs deep in the earth. I was there when He set the limits of the seas so they would not spread beyond their boundaries, and when He marked off the earth's foundations, I was the architect at His side. I was His constant delight, rejoicing always in His presence."

We know about Jesus and His relationship with creation in Colossians 1. Everything was created for Him, by Him, through Him, while the Father was the one that spoke by divine fiat, so we surmise they are working together at creation. At the same time the Spirit was hovering over the face of the waters. It's a beautiful picture of the Trinity calling into being the world that we live in.

Like many dads, I hoped that someday my sons and I would work together in a family business, and here we are today, doing that very thing. We've had our rocky places. Sometimes it's easier to work with strangers than your own family, but there's also a joy that when you do it right that we can be each other's constant delight. Now, two of my boys have their desks about eight feet apart. Sometimes I go in there, and the other son will be standing there visiting from his workspace, and I'll just sit down with them, and be blessed watching them.

One of my son says, "Pop," he said, "The biggest thing you taught me was I can do pretty much anything if I'll work hard. You raised the bar a little bit and expanded my horizons." I didn't do a lot of things right. We could do a whole series on what I did wrong. But every once in a while God encourages us by giving us a glimpse of something that we did do pretty well. It blesses me to work with my sons, and it blesses me to work with my Heavenly Father because, ultimately, we're all His children, and we want to do everything unto the Lord. Amen?

Let's stop there and pray. "Father, thank You for all the opportunities that we have as dads to be modeling for our children, even when we're not specifically going through the point one, two, and three, we're still modeling work ethic, we're modeling his commands are doable. Help us to not put burdens upon our children that we're not able to bear ourself. Help us to be meek and lowly in heart and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness like our Heavenly Father. Help us to convey those things. We're your kids. We're needy, and we want You to carry our burdens, but we're also dads. We're responsible, and I pray that You help us to work with you to see that our children are raised the way that You'd like them to be raised, in Jesus' name, amen."