

Podcast 239 Fathers and Kidz Conclusion, Crumbs For The Children

I thought two podcasts ago would have been our last session on fathers and then we had that wonderful session talking about trust-based parents versus fear-based parenting which God blessed. This week I've been thinking about one more concept to consider.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for all the different things that you have taught us and all that you are continually teaching us and I pray that on this journey, we'll be able to encourage each other today and for those that are listening. We draw near to you humbly asking for the help of your spirit to direct our conversation and our thoughts. In Jesus name. Amen.

If I had a title for this episode it would be: "Crumbs For The Children." We'll come back to this at the end of the podcast.

Many years ago a portion of a Christmas song came to mind. This was a phrase that God had used to make me know that Sandi was going to be my wife. When I was praying and seeking God about whether Sandi was the one I should spend the rest of my life with I recognized I was just plain nervous and fearful. As I was in prayer I sensed God saying: "All the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

God was communicating to me that all my hopes, fears, and concerns were met in Jesus. This phrase is from the song, "O Little Town Of Bethlehem." Over the years I have clung to that truth.

Many years passed and I was praying about an upcoming service and what I would preach about, and that passage came to my mind again. I thought, wow, that will be a good basis for a sermon. All of our hopes and all of our fears are met in Christ.

However the Holy spirit gently convicted me and said, "What about your family?" And I thought, ouch, my first thought was ministry and a great sermon for the church, but not family. But the good Holy spirit gently reminded me that ministry is not first, family is.

So I repented and soon after during a family devotion, I shared and talked about how meaningful this phrase was to me, not only in marriage, but every day. All of our concerns, hopes, and fears, are met in Christ. God blessed this good word in our home and it encouraged all the people that were there for we had some visitors present.

A little later, God led me to preach on that passage in church and it was received with blessing. This was an important lesson to me then and it continues to be an ongoing struggle for me. There have been many times when I've come home from being at a conference for a weekend and I'm whipped, especially if I have conferences on back to back weekends. I have questioned whether I put family first in

those situations because I poured out so much to other families, what do I have left for my family?

Perhaps you're understanding the title now. Do I give my main energies to my work and my ministry or do I give my main energy to my family? Discerning the answer to this question will always be a balancing act. I don't think there's an easy answer, but perhaps a conversation I had with an outstanding ministry leader will help.

I had the privilege to be a boarder at the home Elisabeth Elliot during my second year at Seminary. I first met her brother, David Howard, before I met her. David Howard has served as the President of Latin American Mission, the director of Urbana Missions Conference, which I attended in 1976, and the International director of World Evangelization Fellowship. He was the roommate of Jim Elliot at Wheaton College and the one who introduced Jim Elliot to Elisabeth.

David Howard came to Gordon-Conwell Seminary where I first heard him speak. I made an appointment to speak with him one afternoon, after which I read two of his books. It was several months later that I found out Elisabeth Elliot lived in our area and taught a class at the Seminary. God arranged for me to be a boarder at her home in 1976. Through this connection, I continued to keep in touch with David Howard over the years.

I had just returned from a conference in Singapore for home schoolers and was thinking about David Howard because his family had lived in Singapore for five years. I called his daughter to see how her dad was doing. He was a wonderful man. After we talked she strongly encouraged me to "Call Daddy." I didn't know if he would remember me since I was just an unshaven seminarian when I first met him. She persisted, "No, he'd love to talk to you."

He asked why I was in Singapore, and I said, "Well, I've become kind of an advocate for the family and I was at a conference over helping missionaries who have chosen to homeschool their kids. I also have a ministry now called Building Faith Families." I wasn't sure how he would respond, because old school missionaries, of whom David was one, often felt as if the order of priorities are: God, ministry, family. It was common practice for missionaries in that day and age to place their children in boarding schools and not even see them for months at a time while they were serving on the mission field.

So I was walking carefully. And he said, "Steve, let me tell you something. I love what you're doing." And he went on to affirm it and then he said, "Let me tell you the hardest experience of my life." "Back in the day, when I was a missionary in the field in South America, I would leave my wife to take care of our children, while I would go off into the jungle on mission forays, church planting efforts, and evangelism outreaches. I'd be gone for up to six weeks at a time. It was up to Phyllis to take care of the kids

by herself. This was what we all did on the mission field. Sometime later his teenage son fell away from the faith.

His son was making steps back to God when David I sat down with him and asked: "Son, what happened?" And his son replied, "Dad, when I needed you, you weren't there." David Howard said, "That was the hardest sentence I've ever had to hear." Because of this experience, he changed his priorities and became an advocate of God, family, ministry. He went on to say, "Every time I talk to young couples that are heading to the mission field, if it comes down to a choice between ministry and family, choose family.

Wow. That was powerful. Especially coming from someone of his stature in the mission community. We need to follow suit and give the first fruits to our children and not the crumbs. We need to give our best energies to our family and not what's left over after we've poured out to everybody else. This truth is affirmed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, describing the qualifications for the office of overseer. Some translations call it a bishop.

"If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil."

In verses 8-12, Paul continues describing the qualifications for deacons.

"Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well."

What a statement. Paul doesn't say not to do ministry. But he as much as says, your training ground is going to happen in your own home. As you learn how to love your wife as Christ loved the church and how to manage your own household well, you will be prepared for managing God's home. He then reiterates almost the same message to deacons.

I don't recall hearing that kind of a message when I was training to be a pastor. I wish I had been encouraged to first invest in your wife, then invest in your children and if you do that well, that will prepare you to be in ministry.

This is always going to be a tension for me and I still feel it. You have wonderful opportunities and then you have to say no to them to keep family first. May God help us to be faithful at home.

Let's pray.

Father help us as dads to have our hearts turned towards home, not just our time and our energy and our focus and our priorities, but right down deep, make it so that as we consider these things, our hearts will be turned towards you and our hearts will be turned towards home and that we won't be giving the crumbs to those that are our first priority, but we're giving them our best.

And then through them, you'll equip us to share this message of Christ to our ministries, to our workplaces, to the nations in Jesus' name. Amen.