

June 15, 2008
Houghton Lake UMC

“Strength for the Journey”

Father’s Day
II Peter 1:1-11

What is a man of noble character? On Mother’s Day I asked that question about women, and I feel that it is only right to ask that question of the men today. And so, what is a man of noble character? We will not find one specific scripture that will address the subject, as Proverbs 31 does for the women, but we will find this subject scattered throughout the New Testament epistles as Paul and others describe those who desire to be the elders of the church. So, today I want to take some time to reflect on the character of God for those who would strive to put on the divine nature and to be the fathers we are called to be.

First, I want to make the obvious observation that it is children who make us fathers. Men become fathers when they have children and are responsible to raise them in the way that they should go. In order to do that we must live in such a way that the next generation can learn, grow and follow our life example. Fathers, it is our relationship with our children that defines our fatherhood.

When we think of children, certain special faces come to mind. Many times they are the joys of our heart and the reason we go to work every morning. Sometimes, however, they can be the source of our greatest fear and heartache and send us looking for the times we failed. God calls us to teach them what we know and then to stand back and see if they learned the lesson. They are the fruit of our love. They are the next generation of humans on the planet. Their lives have been entrusted us to nurture, to guide, and to mold into good men and women who will know the Lord, seek righteousness in their own lives and move forward into the future with confidence. To accomplish this we are the ones who

must provide a firm foundation for them to grow upon. Then we have to let them go and watch them spread their wings and exercise independence.

Like teaching them how to ride a bicycle, you can teach them what you know and push them up and down the sidewalk, but there comes a time when you need to let them go and allow them to discover that they can, indeed, ride that bicycle. But that is not the end of it, is it? Then we have to teach them how to ride safely and with responsibility. It's an example of life and the role we play as fathers.

Unfortunately, I have observed that many fathers do not know what power they have over the lives of their children. Fathers have the very image of God to uphold in their children's eyes. There is nothing more powerful in a child's life than to have the approval of their father, the blessing of their father, the encouragement of their father. And there is nothing more damaging in a child's life than to hear destructive words from their father's mouth. Children find their self-identity, their self-worth and their self-esteem from those who are closest to them. A child's entire understanding of who they are, where they come from, and how they relate to the world come from the lips and example of their parents. The role you play as father has ramifications for two generations that come behind you. How important it is, then, that fathers understand God the Father and hear God's expectations of fathers and godly men. We are called to follow God's example in everything. When we are strong in that role our families benefit, and when we fall down or ignore that role, our families suffer. I am not talking about the strength of our arms or the power of our attitudes. I am talking about our spirit and our personal accountability before God.

One of the key roles of a father is to set and enforce productive rules, and to raise our children in such a way that as they grow they can transition from following rules to following and understanding the principles that underlie the rules. Another key role is to give our children grace. You know you've done your job when your children can spiritually move from rules, to principles, to grace and can teach others to do so. We are to lead our children in such a way that they not only follow and embrace God, salvation and goodness, but in time they are also able to teach their children what you have taught them. And so, what do we teach? What is the good that we teach?

God has taught us the Ten Commandments. Jesus gave us the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. So we practice them. We model them for our children. We teach our children that we are as accountable to God, just as our children are accountable to us. We learn how to be consistent in thought, word and deed, and we teach our children to follow these guidelines as well as they follow our example. When we put the Bible into practice in our lives, it is easy to lead our children to do the same. This is one of the primary roles God has given to fathers.

One thing we must realize very early in fatherhood is that we cannot take our children where we have not gone ourselves. We teach more things by example than we teach with our words and our instructions. Children copy what we do before they follow what we say. What we do is often more important than what we say. So, what is it that we do? We should get our nose into the Bible and begin to put into practice what the Bible instructs!

I believe that the Apostle Paul must have had a good father, as he evidences a father's love to the churches under his care. I Thessalonians 2:10-12 gives us one such

glimpse as Paul tells the church at Thessalonica, “You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his children”. (Then Paul goes on to describe how a father deals with his children and he uses these words...) “encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” This was Paul’s description of the role of a father. It became the guiding action of his ministry and message. Paul lived before the church a holy, righteous, and blameless lifestyle as he encouraged, comforted, and urged the church to live lives worthy of God. This is a description of what we need to do for our children. This is the role of a good father.

In Chapter 3 of I Timothy we find Paul’s instructions to his young preacher apprentice, Timothy. Paul teaches Timothy what it takes to be a Bishop or an overseer who is a good spiritual leader. “Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money.” This sounds like a good description of a father to me. By following these guidelines in our personal lives we are putting on the divine nature; we are being like God in word and deed.

And referring to today’s text, in the first chapter of his second epistle Peter exhorts us with these words: “His (Jesus’) divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by

evil desires. For this reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, (agape) love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.”

These instructions describe the character of God. They are the very things that we must do to become righteous, godly men of the kingdom. These characteristics are what we must put into practice and what we must demonstrate for our children in action and value; again, they are faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, (agape) love. Practice these things and you will be fathers that your children can look up to and follow throughout their lives.

What exactly is godliness? It is having the divine nature; it is putting on the divine nature. It is being like God in character, rightness and love. The description of God's character should parallel the character we are working to display and practice. Goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, brotherly kindness and agape, selfless, sacrificial love. These are the things we should strive for and put into practice every day, so that we can teach our children to do and also -- in time -- to become. It is a daunting task. It is a journey that we dare not embark upon alone. To accomplish this it will demand God, walking with us day by day. Fatherhood is a role that keeps us humble, keeps us seeking God with all of our heart and mind and soul and strength. It is a job too big for us, really, and we will need strength for the journey. It is like Joshua, taking over the leadership of the nation of Israel after Moses dies. He not only had to lead the nation, but he had to lead

them into battle and conquer the Promised Land. Joshua found strength for the journey in the promises of God. In Chapter 1 of Joshua, God gives him this promise: “Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee.” The only way we can find strength for the journey is to believe God’s promises, to build our lives on those promises, and to surrender our life to God’s presence and wisdom today and let Him endow us with faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, (agape’) love. Once again we find our victory through faith and surrender. If we are to be the fathers God wants us to be, we are left with only one thing to say to our children: “Follow me as I follow Christ.”

Let us pray.....

Thank you, Lord, for godly fathers who seek to be like You. Help us to be like You, Jesus, in faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and agape love. These are things that You demonstrated in your life, and they are the very things that we want in our lives. Help us to demonstrate them, to put them on, and to model them until they become features of our own character and person. Help us to build our lives on Your great and powerful promises and to move forward by faith in the knowledge that You go with us. Help us to add to our faith these other things so that we can reflect You in our own character and lifestyle. Help us to reflect these attributes in our lives so that we can model them for our children and our grandchildren, and so that we can say, “Follow me as I follow Christ.” We come to You as children ourselves, so that you can mold us to be like You. Help us, Lord, to lay down our selfishness and please do give us strength for the journey. In Your name we pray, Amen.