

## BLESSED ARE THE FOCUSED

This is the weekend when Dads are complimented, pampered, and given gifts. One little boy gave an interesting description of Father's Day. He said, "Father's Day is just like Mother's Day; only you don't spend as much on a present." This is a tough time to be a parent because of all the competing claims on our time, energy, and money. The typical parent, mother or father, could be responding to all of the following claims simultaneously:

The PTO needs a new treasurer, and you are nominated. One of the church leaders begs you to sign on for another year as a Sunday School teacher. The president of the Civic Club calls and begs you to be chairman of the homecoming this year, and reminds you of all the good it does. The cub scouts are desperate for another leader; unless one is found; a den will have to be discontinued.

You just learned at work that a coming retirement will cause some reshuffling. A manager's position will open up. Someone who takes on extra projects and shows lots of enthusiasm is going to move up. It could be you. Then as you face all these choices, you glance at that picture of your family on your desk. The children are growing so fast. Your spouse, only half in jest, suggests that she has to make an appointment to see you. Don't they have legitimate claims on you?

Take heart parents, there is help for you in the scriptures. In Matthew 14:22 there are four very important words. "Jesus dismissed the crowd." This wasn't just any crowd. This was about 10,000 people who had heard Jesus teach, had seen him heal the sick, and had watched him produce food miraculously to feed them all. This crowd was ready to make him King.

But Jesus dismissed them! Why? Read verse 23: "After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountaintop by himself to pray." He said no to a good opportunity in order to say yes to a better one. It was a deliberate choice to honor his priorities. Jesus' first responsibility was not to satisfy a crowd but to be faithful to his heavenly Father.

On another occasion Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek." We don't like that word "Meek." It suggests to us weakness or being wishy-washy or wimpy. But that's not what it means. The Greek word for meek used in the Bible is the same word used to describe a wild stallion that has been trained for the saddle. It means power under control, strength with direction. It means to be focused. Blessed are the focused, those who know their priorities and honor them.

Did you know that there is approximately the same amount of gunpowder in a firecracker as in a rifle shell? But the firecracker is unfocused. It just makes a big noise and accomplishes nothing. The

rifle shell, on the other hand, focuses that power in a specific direction and delivers an enormous punch. You can be a firecracker Christian or a rifle shot Christian. It's a matter of focus. St. Paul was a highly focused, rifle shot Christian. He declared, "I press toward the mark for the high call of God in Christ Jesus." You can be a firecracker parent or a rifle shot parent. One makes a lot of noise. The other gets results. It's a matter of focus. On this father's day weekend, let me suggest three truths that may help us focus on healthy priorities.

#### FIRST, A PARENT IS A ROLE MODEL 24 HOURS PER DAY.

Parents communicate values by what they say, what they praise, what they condemn, what they ignore, but even more powerfully by the way they live. Our children listen to our every word, watch our every deed, and draw their own conclusions. I know a mother who picked up her five-year-old son from kindergarten and then hastened to run five errands on the way home. She was in a big hurry and driving too fast. When she saw the policeman's red lights flashing behind her, she was totally frustrated.

He pulled her over and asked to see her license. There was a long silence while she searched for it. Suddenly her son's little voice was heard from the backseat saying, "Mama, he doesn't look like a turkey to me." Our children hear everything we say. We are role models for them constantly.

If you mutter racial slurs as you listen to the evening news, your child will form conclusions about people of other races. If your child hears you use God's name carelessly or profanely, the child will draw conclusions both about God and your relationship with God. None of us is perfect. We sometimes show our worst sides before our children. How important it is at such times to acknowledge our failings honestly and ask for forgiveness.

#### A SECOND TRUTH FOR PARENTS IS THIS: NOTHING CAN SUBSTITUTE FOR YOUR PRESENCE.

Many parents rationalize by saying, "I don't spend much time with my kids, but what we have is quality time." What a load of hooey.

A first-grader asked his mother why his Dad brought home a briefcase full of material each night. She explained that he had so much work to do that he couldn't get it all done at the office. The youngster pondered this soberly, then asked, "Well, why don't they put him in a slower group." Parents, remember this. If you can't say no to some claims, your life will drip away like a leaky faucet. You won't make much of a splash anywhere.

I was in a meeting one afternoon when I raised my hand and said, "I know what we are doing here is important. But I must leave at 5:00 sharp. One of my sons has a Little League Baseball game that starts at 5:30 and I promised him I would be there." Everybody in the room stared at me with open admiration. I had said no when something more important required a yes.

**FINALLY, A THIRD TRUTH ABOUT PARENTING: NO ONE CAN LEAD A CHILD TO GOD AS WELL AS A PARENT.**

If the parents fail, chances are small that the church or a grandparent or a friend can make up that deficit. Children are bright. If they sense that the Bible is not a vitally important book in your life, chances are that it won't be in theirs. If they seldom see you pray, except a perfunctory prayer at meal-time, they will not take prayer seriously. If children sense that Sunday worship is a grim duty rather than a treasured privilege, they will stop attending as soon as they get a chance. I remember a mother who took her dog to obedience class each week without fail, and paid considerable money for it. But she failed to bring her little daughter to Sunday School even though it was free. One day God may ask her, "Why did you care more about your dog's obedience than about your precious daughter's relationship with me?"

Clovis Chappell, a great Methodist Preacher of a previous generation, used to tell the story of two paddleboat steamers. They left Memphis about the same time, traveling down the river to New Orleans. As they traveled side by side, crew members made disparaging remarks about the slowness of the other boat. Words were exchanged. Challenges were made. And the race was on.

The competition was keen as the boats roared down the Mississippi. One boat began falling behind. Not enough fuel. There had been plenty of coal for the trip, but not enough for a race. As the boat dropped back, an enterprising crew member took some of the ship's cargo and tossed it into the boilers. Their boat began to catch up, so they made fuel out of more and more cargo. They finally won the race, but in the process they burned their cargo, the very material they had been hired to transport.

Parents, our primary mission is not to win a race, but to faithfully care for those persons entrusted to us, especially our children. So remain focused on the goal. The goal of eternal life. Remember, blessed are the focused, those who know their priorities and honor them.