

# “The Things We Remember”

2 Samuel 18:24-33 <sup>1</sup>

The world in which we live often feels as though it’s threatening to come apart at the seams. As of last night, the United Nations lists ten major wars and thirty-two active conflicts in our world,<sup>2</sup> and even if at the moment we ourselves are not in an obvious battle for physical survival, we’re pummeled 24/7 by news that warns: DANGER! DANGER!! DANGER!!!

We can make two very different errors in dealing with these matters, one of which is to become panicked and obsessed with them, and the other is to do our best to ignore them, trying to block them out of our consciousness. As it often is, the most productive place to live is somewhere between these poles, but it’s not uncommon in discussions of world events to hear someone say, “At least I’m glad I don’t have small children to raise in a world such as this.” Oh, but this is to so miss the point!

Knowing that we were going to get back late last night from our mission trip to the Gulf Coast, I began looking several weeks ago for a Fathers’ Day sermon I might update for this morning’s worship. Looking through my files, I discovered that Fathers’ Day, 1981 also fell on June 21, and the core of today’s message comes from the sermon I prepared for that service, twenty-eight years ago.

On that morning I identified then-current conflicts in Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, and Syria. Sounds a lot like today’s news, doesn’t it? We humans are pretty predictable in our persistent efforts to destroy each other. And so it is into such a world as this—a world much as it has always been—that we come to think together about Fathers’ Day.

Parenthood, whether as father or mother, is life’s most sacred responsibility, pregnant with possibilities for life’s greatest joys and for life’s greatest sorrows. Parenting is a supreme privilege, even in such days as these, indeed, precisely because these days are as they are, because parents make the difference.

We parents are the primary teachers of our children, for better or for worse, whether we want to be or not, and no matter what government may have to say about the matter. In the formative years in which the die is cast, the twig bent, and the neurons connected, we parents have virtually unlimited opportunities to shape the lives, hearts, minds, and spirits of our children—if we take them.

And that’s the key for us as fathers: if we take them. Our wives understand these things much better than we do, guys. You and I tend to occupy ourselves with our work and with “manly amusements,” biding our time until our children are old enough to teach about hunting or fishing or sports, and ducking many of the opportunities we have to shape their young lives. I know this from observation, from research reports . . . and because I did it, too.

---

<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the First Baptist Church of Bristol, Virginia on June 21, 2009. It was originally delivered at the First Baptist Church of Carlisle, Kentucky on Fathers’ Day, June 21, 1981, and has been slightly revised and updated.

<sup>2</sup> [www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/index.html](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/index.html) More than 75 percent of those killed or wounded in today’s conflicts are non-combatants. In World War I, that number was less than five percent.

Guys, our children begin developing their life values—those core principles that will anchor and guide their lives—from their first breath onward.<sup>3</sup> The ways in which even our very small children spend their time is not morally neutral. We may not have to protect our families from the same threats and enemies that our early settlers did, but threats and enemies still exist, more powerful and insidious than anything that was in these woods 250 years ago.

I'm a big fan of technology, but technology can be one of our greatest enemies in fathering and protecting our children. It used to be that monitoring television was our greatest challenge. Now the purveyors of perversion find access to our children through videos, CDs, DVDs, MP3s, cell phone text messages and cameras, Internet predators on Facebook and MySpace . . . there's just no end to it, nor will there be.

Our families are literally flooded with value systems from outside the walls of our homes, some of which are allies, and some of which are enemies. A battle rages at this very moment for the hearts, minds, and souls of our kids, and we dare not ignore it.

With this as background, let's look again at our text at the end of 2 Samuel 18, which you no doubt find strange for Fathers' Day. I'll agree that it's unusual, and the background to this text is even stranger; but I hope to be able to bring this all back to Fathers' Day in the end!

The Bible tells us that King David had at least twenty sons, "*not including the sons of his concubines,*" and at least one daughter (1 Chronicles 3:1-9). Most of these sons had different mothers, so the potential for disaster was built into the system from the first. The oldest of these sons was Amnon, and the story that follows is very sad indeed (it's found in 2 Samuel 13-19).

As they became adults, Amnon raped his half-sister, Tamar, who had a brother named Absalom—the same Absalom who appeared in this morning's text. Two years later, Absalom arranged for Amnon to be murdered in revenge for his sister's shame, after which he fled Jerusalem in fear of his father's anger.

After three more years, Joab, the General of David's armies, persuaded David to recall Absalom to Jerusalem, but even though David allowed Absalom to return to the capital city, he continued to refuse to see or to speak to him. After two more years, when it became obvious to Absalom that his father did not intend to be reconciled, Absalom began a campaign to undermine the people's confidence in his father's rule.

After four years of stealing the hearts of the people away from his father, Absalom staged a coup d'état, which apparently took David completely by surprise. David and the officials loyal to him had to run for their lives, with the rebellion ending only after Absalom's humiliating death as described in our text.

As the runner brought news of Absalom's death to David, he said, "*I have good news for my lord the king. Today the LORD has rescued you from all those who rebelled against you.*" *When David realized that Absalom was dead, he was overcome with emotion. He went up to his room over the gateway and burst into tears. And as he went, he cried, 'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I could have died instead of you! O Absalom, my son, my son'*" (2 Samuel 18:31-33).

---

<sup>3</sup> I would suggest that we actually begin such development at conception. A mother's lifestyle during pregnancy has significant predisposing power toward later lifestyle—bad habits such as smoking, drinking, or using other drugs having perhaps more effect than more positive pursuits.

As David wept above the gate, his grief was perhaps made more bitter as he remembered his own failures as a father that had contributed to this outcome. It seems to me that these failures were of two sorts:

First, **David didn't deal with his children's wrong behavior.** When Amnon violated his sister, David was angry about it, but the Bible says that he did nothing (2 Samuel 13:21). When Absalom had Amnon murdered, David wept bitterly, but he did nothing (13:36). When Joab persuaded David to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem, David did bring him back, but then he did nothing (14:24).<sup>4</sup>

For us, too, it is neither kind nor loving to let our children always do as they please, and such dereliction of duty allows our enemy to plant poison in their souls. All sin carries within it seeds that lead to a harvest death and destruction, both in time and in eternity. Biblical discipline imposes relatively small penalties now to avoid huge penalties later (Hosea 8:7; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 12:5-12).

Proverbs reminds us that *“those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children. Those who love their children care enough to discipline them. . . . Don't fail to discipline your children. They won't die if you spank them. . . . Discipline your children while there is hope. Otherwise you will ruin their lives. . . . Physical discipline may well save them from death”* (Proverbs 13:24, 23:13, 19:18, 23:14).

Second, not only did David neglect to prevent sinful character qualities from taking root in his children's lives, but **he also gave little attention to building godly character qualities into their lives.** While it may have been proverbial that David *“knew everything that happens in the land”* (2 Samuel 14:20), he didn't keep up with his own children or with their behavior. David was taken completely by surprise by Absalom's rebellion in large part because he hadn't spent any time with Absalom in nearly eleven years.

As any gardener knows, it takes time to select good seed, to properly prepare the soil, to plant effectively, to keep weeds from taking over, to provide proper nutrition, and to provide direction to growing plants. If there is to be any beauty in the garden, any worthy product in the harvest, then there must be time and toil in the training.

It's as true now as ever that “faith is more caught than taught,” and our children have an unnerving ability to discern the moral values that really guide our lives. They watch us, and who we are is inescapable, no matter what we say. If we don't practice what we preach, our children may parrot our preaching, but they will copy our practice.

The old man's eyes were blind and his hands trembled as he ate. He used his silverware poorly, and he often dribbled food on the tablecloth. With no other place to go, he lived with his son and his family, who eventually grew weary of the old man's messiness, and they took him gently but firmly to the corner of the kitchen and served him his food in an earthenware bowl.

One day, when the old man trembled more than usual, his bowl fell and broke. He was silent while being scolded for his clumsiness, and the next day his son bought him a wooden bowl from which to eat his meals.

---

<sup>4</sup> See also 1 Samuel 3:13 where Eli knew about his sons' wrongdoing, but did nothing.

Now this couple also had a four year-old son of whom they were quite proud. One evening they noticed him playing intently with some pieces of wood. When they asked him what he was doing, he told them that he was making a little trough for them to eat from when he got big.

The couple looked at each other for a while without saying anything. Then they cried. Finally they went to the corner and brought the old man back to the table. After that, he sat in a comfortable chair and ate his food from a plate with everyone else. And nobody scolded or fussed when he clattered or spilled or broke things.

Guys, what we do and who we are as fathers affects both who our children are today and who they will become tomorrow. Let us beware lest we teach them things that they will later have to unlearn if they're going to become like Jesus.

And I doubt that any experience does more to communicate our values, remove spiritual weeds, and plant good spiritual seeds in our children's lives than leading them in family worship as their fathers. If walking with God really is the highest priority of our lives, then our family activities and schedules will reflect that priority. My friend, Dwight Moody, whom some of you met a couple of weeks ago, wrote a little poem about such family worship when his sons were small:

When Daddy prays, the house gets still. His voice is low and deep.  
We shut our eyes, the clock ticks loud, so quiet we must keep.

When Daddy prays he doesn't use those words the preacher does.  
There's different things for different days, but mostly, it's for us.

He prays that we may be good boys, and later on, good men.  
We just squirm and think we won't ever fuss again.

His prayers are awfully long and hard to understand,  
So I just wiggle way up close and let him hold my hand.

I can't remember all of it, I'm little yet, you see.  
But this one thing I won't forget: my Daddy prays for me.

It's strange what you remember when life comes crashing in as it did for King David after Absalom's death. And it's strange what we remember when similar circumstances crash into our own lives. . . .

John Cameron stood looking out at the rain. His mind flashed back to that evening three weeks before when he had come home with a bulging briefcase. It was time to get out the annual report.

After a hurried dinner he had gone immediately to his desk, working on those all-important papers, when little Margie came in with her new book: "Daddy, will you read my book to me?" she asked.

"Let your Mother read it, honey. Daddy's busy."

"But Mommy's putting away the dishes. You read it to me."

"You don't understand, sweetheart. Daddy must have these papers ready for the printer in the morning. I don't have time to read your book to you now."

"Okay, Daddy," Margie said, "Read it to yourself. Only read it loud enough so I can hear."

So much had happened since that night . . . the carefree child, the speeding car . . . "I'm ready, John." It was his wife calling from upstairs. It was time to go . . . to Margie's funeral.

Yes, it's strange what you remember when life comes crashing in . . . "Read it to yourself, Daddy. Only read it loud enough so I can hear."

Guys, the world is coming unglued all around us, and parents make the difference. What are you going to remember when all is said and done? What are your kid's going to remember? Let's love our kids, spend time with them, and shape their lives NOW . . . while we still can.

David failed to prevent sinful character qualities from taking root in his children's lives, and he gave little attention to building godly character qualities into their lives. These are responsibilities that God has given to us as Dads, and God will help us accomplish them.

I like these words of encouragement from Hebrews: *So take a new grip with your tired hands and stand firm on your shaky legs. Mark out a straight path for your feet. Then those who follow you, though they are weak and lame, will not stumble and fall but will become strong* (Hebrews 12:12-13).<sup>5</sup>

## That's Worth Everything

I may never be as clever as my neighbor down the street,  
I may never be as wealthy as some others that I meet,  
I may never have the glory that some other men have had,  
But I've got to be successful as that little boy's Dad.

There are dreams that I cherish that I'd like to see come true,  
There are things that I'd accomplish e'er my working time is through,  
But the task my heart is set on is to guide a little lad,  
And to make myself successful as that little boy's Dad.

I may never come to glory; I may never gather gold;  
Folks may count me as a failure when my business life is told;  
But if he who follows after shall be manly, I'll be glad,  
For I'll know I've been successful as that little boy's Dad.

It's the one job that I dream of, it's the task I think of most—  
If I fail that little fellow I have nothing else to boast;  
For the wealth and fame I'd gather . . . all my fortune would be sad  
If I fail to be successful as that little boy's Dad.

modified from Bill Gaither

---

<sup>5</sup> See [www.fathers.com](http://www.fathers.com) for ideas and encouragement about fathering.