

# A Spiritual Father

**Introduction.** On July 5, 1908, a West Virginia church sponsored the nation's first event explicitly in honor of fathers, a Sunday sermon in memory of the 362 men who had died in an explosion at the Fairmont Coal Company mines, but it was a one-time commemoration and not an annual holiday. The next year, a Spokane, Washington woman named Sonora Smart Dodd, one of six children raised by a widower, tried to establish an official equivalent to Mother's Day for male parents. She went to local churches, the YMCA, shopkeepers, and government officials to drum up support for her idea, and Washington State celebrated the nation's first statewide Father's Day on July 19, 1910. When World War II began, advertisers began to argue that celebrating Father's Day was a way to honor American troops and support the war effort. By the end of the war, Father's Day may not have been a federal holiday, but it was a national institution. It was not until 1972, 58 years after President Woodrow Wilson made Mother's Day official, that the day became a nationwide holiday in the United States.

In a land of opportunity, you can literally be anything if you try hard enough. There is something you will always be, whether you try or not — an example. Examples are important. Jesus, the greatest teacher of all time, used examples as one of His chief means of teaching. He spoke of people: Abraham, David, Solomon, Moses, Jonah, and Noah. He mentioned places: Sodom, Gomorrah, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Tyre, and Sidon. He referred to objects: the temple, sparrows, lilies, seed, salt, and light.

Wherever there is an example, there is an influence. In Romans 5:19, Paul goes all the way back to Adam to show the advantage of influence. Paul was a great spiritual father to his spiritual son, Timothy (2 Timothy 1:1-8). Fathers are good spiritual parents to their own children and their children in the faith by having the four following traits.

## ***I. A Father's Mind (vv. 1-2)***

- A. While the introduction may seem stiff and formal given that it is addressed to Paul's closest associate, Paul could never forget the noble work to which he was so impressively called (Acts 9:15-16; 22:14-15, 21; 26:15-18). The phrase "by the will of God" reflects Paul's deep consciousness of the divine purpose for his life in preaching the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16).
- B. Paul's own circumstances were grim, but whatever happened to him was in the hands of God, so there was no need to fear. Furthermore, Paul had "the promise of life" in Jesus Christ, and Christ had defeated death (2 Timothy 1:10).
- C. In his first letter Paul greeted Timothy as "my true son in the faith;" here it is "my dearly beloved son." Paul had a warm affection for his young coworker so it is no wonder that he wanted to extend to Timothy "grace" (spiritual love), "mercy" (physical compassion), and "peace" (a sense of wholeness). A spiritual father seeks the best for his child and wishes him or her to be full of all the blessings God has to offer.

## ***II. A Father's Ministry (vv. 3-4)***

- A. Paul here follows his regular custom of having a thanksgiving right after the greeting. Paul was serving God "from my forefathers." He greatly appreciated his religious heritage (cp. Acts 22:3; 24:14; Philippians 3:5-6), and so today should

all those who have been brought up in a godly environment. The apostle served God with a clean or pure conscience (1 Timothy 1:5; cp. Acts 23:1).

- B. Paul was constantly (“without ceasing,” “night and day”) remembering Timothy in prayer (cp. Romans 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 3:6). “Long” is a word expressing intense desire. Recalling Timothy’s tears, probably when they last parted, Paul deeply longed to see his son in the faith, that he might be “filled with joy.”
- C. In Paul’s letters we see this man of God’s real humanity. He must have had a large heart to carry such a loving concern for so many people. A spiritual father prays for his child and desires to spend time with the child.

### **III. A Father’s Memory (vv. 5-6)**

- A. Something had brought Timothy’s faith to Paul’s remembrance. That faith was “unfeigned” or sincere which came from his godly mother and grandmother (cp. Acts 16:1-5).
- B. Because of his sincere faith and spiritual heritage, Timothy is urged to “stir up the gift of God” that was given to him when Paul laid his hands on him (1 Timothy 4:14). The tendency of fire is to go out and it must be stirred occasionally.
- C. While Timothy’s gift was miraculous, our gifts today may be by nature, inheritance, or development.
  - 1. Some people naturally can sing; they may improve their singing by training. But sometimes our gifts are the result of practice, development, and study. An orator may have a gift of speaking well, but training and the combination of significant facts, will develop him into a statesman.
  - 2. We are to use the gifts we have. While the comparison to the various members of a body in 1 Corinthians 12 is primarily an analogy of the various spiritual gifts the Spirit conveyed on members in the ancient church, it is an undisputed truth that the different members in the physical body differ in function but each contribute something of value to the whole body (Romans 12:4-8).
- D. A spiritual father reminds his child of past, positive progress and encourages him or her to develop talents and grow in Christ (Matthew 25:14-30; cp. Hebrews 5:12-14).

### **IV. A Father’s Message (vv. 7-8)**

- A. Paul is fond of making a negative statement and then following it with positive ideas (cp. Romans 14:17). God has not given us a spirit of “fear” or cowardice, but a spirit of “power,” “love,” and “self-discipline.” The effective Christian must have the power of the scriptures, but that power must be expressed in a loving spirit (2 Timothy 2:24-25). And often the deciding factor between success and failure is the matter of self-discipline (a unique New Testament word meaning knowing what to do and what to avoid, Proverbs 25:28).
- B. This is one of the several passages in these two letters that may be hinting at a naturally timid nature Timothy possessed. He had been brought up by his mother and grandmother, and now Paul was taking the place of a father to him, giving him that encouraging voice.

- C. Paul felt that his young colleague needed to have his courage strengthened. Thus he urges him not to be “ashamed of the testimony of our Lord,” nor “of me his prisoner.” The aged apostle was now a prisoner of the emperor Nero and was facing almost certain death. Timothy must not be so fearful as to be ashamed to visit Paul in prison. Instead, he is told to “be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel” for the sake of Christ and the gospel (Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:10-12).
- D. A father looks to strengthen and encourage a child. Paul’s message to Timothy encouraged him to stand firm for the Lord (2 Timothy 3:1-4; 4:1-4), and we should encourage our spiritual children in the same way.

**Conclusion.** The southern kingdom had a noble standard in David (1 Samuel 16:7; Acts 13:22). Judah had the fantastic opportunity of having six good kings, who although only representing 30% of the number of kings, reigned for 68% of the time. These six men could not save the nation in the end, but I am sure there are many Israelites in Heaven because of the shadow cast by David.

For Israel, there was no true godliness which would filter through the throne. The standard according to which the Israelite kings are judged is the shameful reign of Jeroboam, the first king who occupied the throne of the northern kingdom after the split of the ten tribes from Judah. The distinguishing epitaph of Jeroboam, is “Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 22:52). Again and again, in the records of kings, Jeroboam is referred to by this distinction. It is written of 15 out of the 19 kings who followed Jeroboam on the throne of Israel that “he did evil” like Jeroboam. The words almost became a refrain. His influence lasted 250 years until, degraded and deported, Israel was torn to pieces by the Assyrian Empire.

Our influence is so critical that it may contribute to the salvation or the condemnation of other souls. Perhaps some of you are even now thanking God for the beloved model of a departed saintly parent, or of some other departed Christian. God help our fathers to be a sanctified influence which will linger on to heal and bless.