

### **RAISE US UP**

Driving to church this week, I saw a dad out on a walk, pushing a baby stroller down the sidewalk, and with two big dogs, German Shepherds. I thought to myself, "That's a lot of poop that guy's gotta deal with." Well, that's fatherhood!

The Bible lays a great calling upon fathers. Our world needs not only mothers but God-pleasing fathers as well. The raising up of children is a topic important for us all because how we shape our children is how we shape the shared world that we must all then live in together, for better or worse.

Sure, we want to honor our fathers. Thank you, men! But to be clear, the fathers we are honoring are not those who simply help bring a child into the world but those who continue to be faithful to the task of bringing a adult into the world.

There are two dimensions to right living: the spiritual (the vertical dimension) and the earthly (the horizontal dimension).

- The vertical is all about being in right relationship with God.
- The horizontal is all about how we live that out with other people.
- Notice how it forms the shape of the cross.

The 10 Commandments follow this pattern exactly.

- The first three commandments, the first tablet it's called, are all about right relationship with God.
- No other Gods. No taking God's name in vain. Being faithful in worship. These are the vertical commandments.
- The rest of the commandments, the 2<sup>nd</sup> tablet, are all about right relationship with people.
- Don't murder, commit adultery, steal, lie about others, or covet what belongs to them.
- These are the horizontal commandments, how you live it out in society.

The connector between the two parts is the commandment to honor your father and mother.

- Parents are God's intended agents for raising new people who are both pleasing to God and blessings to the world.
- Ephesians 6 says: "*Honor your father and mother*"—*this is the first commandment with a promise: "so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."*

Our parents are the first place we learn about love, which is why early love is so critical.

- We learn what love is by being loved and cared for.
- From love we learn trust, and the ability to trust is critical for a good life.

And yes, the home is also where good discipline must be taught and learned.

- But notice that discipline is not the first lesson.
- Live-giving discipline best takes shape where love, trust, and faith are already present.

We all need discipline, even corrective discipline at times. But it's not the most fun part of the job of being a father. The temptation is to feel sorry for yourself, "Ah, don't make me be the bad guy."

- But being raised in loving discipline becomes a lifelong blessing.
- We all walk better when we have two legs, one of love, the other of discipline.

Still, Ephesians 6 warns fathers against taking discipline too far. "*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*"

- Parents are in middle management, obedient ourselves to God's higher principles, even as we are raising up our children in those same ways.
- This not only gives guidance to the discipline but puts limits on it.

In this way, you see, our parents become also our first teachers about authority.

- The home is where we learn lessons about authority.
- Society is where we live out those lessons, for better or worse.
- Ask any schoolteacher if you want to learn more about this.

There are two lessons about authority that must be learned young so they can be lived out later:

- The right exercise of authority.
- The right respect of authority.

The healthy back-and-forth rhythm of authority properly exercised and properly respected, is necessary and is a blessing to all. Without it, society will be broken.

- Again, there is a proper developmental order.
- The right respect of authority will not be learned until the right exercise of it is practiced.
- How do you think it's going now for our society with these issues?
- Injustice is evidence that authority is not being properly exercised.
- **Let us put Love and Order before Law and Order.**

I emailed several Ascension dads asking them how it was going being a dad during this time of the coronavirus and if they had any advice for other dads:

- The general word I got is that it hasn't been easy, but it's been good. One even said it's been great. But it takes a team. There's a respect for the single parents who are trying to manage all this on their own now.
- The advice? Be there in the moments when your kids need you. Put your work aside then.
- A common denominator is how their Christian faith is key to their own peace of mind and family togetherness.

I close with this witness from one of our Ascension fathers:

“Jesus and having faith has definitely helped during this time. We eat and pray as a family three times a day and then again at bedtime after books. We want to teach our children that we need to be thankful for what we have and not take things for granted.”

- That sure sounds to me like a home where the children are being raised up not only as blessed themselves but to be a blessing to others someday.

May we all, even when old, still continue to be raised upwards to the higher callings of our Heavenly Father through Christ our Lord. Amen.