

Our Fathers Who Are on Earth

If Satan thinks they are a key battleground, shouldn't we?

by Roland C. Warren

I am the president of a secular organization that works to increase the number of children who grow up with involved, responsible, and committed fathers. Christians often ask me, "Why should I be concerned about your work of connecting fathers to their children? Shouldn't the Great Commission and soul winning be our number one priority?"

These questions remind me of what happened to my wife when she was having lunch with a non-Christian friend a few years ago. She asked her friend if she minded prayer before the meal. Her friend said, "That's fine," so my wife started her prayer with the phrase "Dear heavenly Father." When she finished, her friend said that she could never pray those words since her father was such an [expletive].

I believe that today Christians often overlook three important truths about the Great Commission. These truths can radically change the way we view our work of sharing Jesus with others so they might come into an intimate relationship with our heavenly Father.

First, the relationship people have with their fathers may directly affect their ability to relate to God the Father. A "loving heavenly Father" has no meaning to those who don't know what a loving father is. In fact, if their fathers were so terrible, any god who's also a father must be infinitely terrible!

Jesus, on the other hand, in coming to tell the world how good the heavenly Father is, used his relationship with his Father as an evangelistic tool.

Second, the epidemic of one out of every three kids in America growing up without a father is not a coincidence. There is a concerted attack on the institution of fatherhood by Satan himself. The Devil's work is to influence dads to be disconnected, distant, or even abusive, so that children start life believing that this is how *all* fathers are—even a heavenly Father.

And why attack the father? Because the greatest, most powerful truth that any person who does not know Christ needs to hear in order to be saved is this: God is a good *Father* whose desire and plan is to bring back his lost children to himself. Satan knows that good fathers can pave the way for the gospel and, conversely, bad or absent fathers pave the way to separation from God.

Third, a life-changing truth about how we should preach the gospel can be found in the parable of the sower. In it, the Word of God is the seed that is being sown into different types of ground, which represent the types of hearts into which the Word can be sown. As we know, only one type of heart brought forth the fruit of salvation—the good, fertile ground.

The problem isn't that the Word isn't fruitful, nor is it that the sower isn't sowing. The hindering force in this parable is the type of ground into which the Word is being sown.

Thus, our work is to prepare the ground so that it may bring forth fruit. We can do this by teaching fathers how to support and nurture their kids and by helping them feel the importance of their efforts.

It is no coincidence that many of the problems Satan has sown into people's lives are directly tied to the relationship with their family—specifically, their father. Satan is trying to create stony ground to make it harder for the gospel to yield its fruit.

The power contained in the father-son relationship was clearly evident in Jesus' own life. Before he departed for the desert, his Father opened up the heavens, and announced to the world: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Here was Jesus—fully God and fully man—yet God the Father knew that in Jesus' humanity, he needed the fatherly affirmation that he was loved and accepted before he entered a time of tremendous temptation.

It's the chief model for all earthly fathers. All children will face temptation. How they respond will depend largely on what they have experienced—the truth of God modeled and affirmed by their fathers, or the lies of Satan who has kept them isolated from the life-giving encouragement of their families.

The work of connecting fathers to their children is not something to do in addition to preaching the gospel, but is a central part of how we can sow the Word into the hearts of children who will be able to call God *Father*.

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