

Success and Failure

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Introduction

In this lesson, let us reflect upon the difference between success and failure as parents. In a word, the crucifixion of self is key to parental success (Matthew 16:24-25; Galatians 2:20). Selfishness is at the root of all sin. Selfish parents are inattentive to the needs of their children. However, God demands a higher standard: The hearts of the fathers must be attuned to the needs of their children (Malachi 4:6).

Function

Parental success is based upon each member of the home fulfilling his or her divinely assigned function. Husbands must provide loving leadership, wives respond with respectful submission (Ephesians 5:22-33). Attitudes and demeanor are critically important (1 Peter 3:1-7).

Failure in the family often results from a failure in function. Role reversals often occur. Husbands refuse to lead and wives refuse to submit. The henpecked husband cowers while the wife rules the roost. Attitudes are abysmal, actions abhorrent (Proverbs 21:9; 19; 27:15-16). As an illustration of this problem, let us consider one particularly infamous political marriage where the husband is weak and vacillating, the wife dominant and manipulative, and they both get in trouble over a crooked land deal. Sound familiar? You can read about it in 1st Kings chapter 21. King Ahab sought to acquire Naboth's vineyard. When he did not get his way, the king became sullen and vexed; "And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and ate no food." However, his wife, Queen Jezebel, comes to his rescue. Taking charge of the situation, she plotted the death of Naboth. Because Ahab acquiesced to her evil doings, both stood condemned (1 Kings 21:1-26).

Parental failure often results from another kind of role reversal: Parents act like children, and children are considered equal with adults. No one is in control; the inmates run the asylum. When confronted with wrong-doing on the part of a child, the father loses self-control. When faced with childishness on the part of little ones, the mother stomps her feet like she is two. Parents are not permitted to act like children. Adults must behave like adults. Some parents need to grow up (1 Corinthians 14:20; 16:13; Ephesians 4:14-15).

Fellowship

Parental success is based upon the husband and wife being truly committed to a permanent marital fellowship. Dissolving the marriage is not a problem solving option. God hates divorce, viewing it as a cruel and treacherous act of covenant breaking (Malachi 2:13-16). According to

the divine pattern, marriage is a life-long commitment. Jesus allows but one exception to this rule (Matthew 19:3-9). Children feel an abiding sense of security when their parents are wholly committed to the marriage. In contrast, doubt and insecurity predominate when the marital bond is tenuous. Let us, therefore, fear the Lord and walk in his ways, especially in the matter of leaving and cleaving (Psalm 128:1-4).

Fortune

Parental success is based upon both parents having a proper value system. Material wealth is not the measure of all things. Settling in the well-watered valley of the Jordan, Lot was more concerned with the promise of physical blessings than the perils of spiritual wickedness (Genesis 13:5-13). Yes, Lot was oppressed with the sensual conduct of unprincipled men; day after day, his righteous soul was vexed with their unlawful deeds (2 Peter 2:7-8). However, his family did not share his sense of outrage. When forced to leave Sodom, Lot's wife looked back, thus revealing the affections of her heart (Genesis 19:24-26; Luke 17:32). In like manner, his two daughters, having been corrupted by their wicked environment, acted in the most depraved manner one could possibly imagine (Genesis 19:30-38).

What lessons can be drawn from this Biblical story? First of all, we see the folly of materialism. Contentment is commanded, covetousness condemned (1 Timothy 6:6-10). Some fathers devote so much time to mammon that they have little or nothing left over for God or their family. Time is the most precious commodity we possess. Let us, therefore, redeem it (Ephesians 5:15-16). Esteeming the spiritual above the physical, let us store up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:31-33; Luke 12:31-34).

Forbearance

Parental success is based upon both parents showing proper forbearance. Patience is, indeed, a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). However, loving tolerance for weakness does not invalidate the Biblical standard. God's revealed word remains authoritative, in our individual lives, and our collective functions (Ephesians 4:1-6). Eli failed as a father in the area of forbearance: His sons did evil, but he did not rebuke or restrain them (1 Samuel 3:10-18). David made the same mistake regarding his son Adonijah (1 Kings 1:5-6).

The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother (Proverbs 29:15). Avoiding a false form of forbearance, let us chasten our sons while there is hope (Proverbs 19:18). Loving discipline results in the ultimate blessing: Rescuing their soul from hell (Proverbs 23:13-14).

Fairness

Parental success is based upon both parents showing proper fairness. Fathers in particular should avoid sinful behavior that results in anger and exasperation (Colossians 3:21; Ephesians 6:4). King Saul, in his dealings with David and Jonathan, provides a tragic illustration of this shortcoming (1 Samuel 20:30-34).

Another manifestation of this problem involves the issue of favoritism. Isaac loved Esau, while Rebekah loved Jacob (Genesis 25:21-28). Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons (Genesis 37:3-4). Acting with partiality violates the will of God (Deuteronomy 1:17; 1 Timothy 5:21; James 2:1). Friction, fighting and factionalism is the unavoidable fruit of favoritism.

Freedom

Parental success is based upon both parents having a proper concept of freedom. Some fathers freely neglect their family in pursuit of their personal interests: hunting, fishing, hobbies, work, etc. Some mothers walk away from their husbands and children, seeking “Freedom!” By the same token, children are often given too much freedom, too many options, too little discipline, too little responsibility. However, from a Biblical standpoint, freedom is rooted in truth and discipleship. Ours is a freedom from sin, not a freedom to sin (John 8:31-36). “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” Yet, this liberty finds full expression as we are transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). Freedom is used, not as an opportunity for the flesh, but as an opportunity for loving service to one another (Galatians 5:13-14).

Faithfulness

Parental success is based upon both parents having a proper concept of faithfulness. We need to manifest the commitment of Joshua (Joshua 24:15-31). We need to seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33). We need to deny self, take up our cross and follow Christ. Priorities must be set: How much do we value heaven? How much do we value our souls? (Matthew 16:24-26). How can this be accomplished? Successful parents start early. They walk in the truth and demand their children do the same. They set aside time for family prayer and Bible study. They work and play together. They provide structure, guidance and rules. They are serious about their obligations to the local congregation. They attend area Gospel Meetings, thus allowing their children to meet Christians in other congregations. They develop relationships with like-minded Christians. They extend and enjoy hospitality, inviting the brethren into their homes, and graciously accepting when the favor is returned. They provide multiple opportunities for their children to associate with the children of other Christians. They eliminate distractions and temptations, turning off the radio, TV, video games, etc. They make opportunities to discuss God’s word, during travel, during the day, at supper, at bedtime, etc.

Conclusion

Success and failure as parents is contingent upon doing the will of God (Joshua 1:7-8). Therefore, let us establish a proper value system regarding our view of function, fellowship, fortune, forbearance, fairness, freedom and faithfulness in the family relationship.