

A FATHER'S INFLUENCE

If I asked, "Commonly, what are people's most powerful influences in life?" we would suggest many possibilities. Our suggestions would depend on two things: how we look at life and what we define as powerful influences.

For those who define life in terms of fun and pleasure, their suggestions for powerful influences focus on things they believe produce fun and pleasure. For those who define life in terms of success, their suggestions for powerful influences focus on their symbols of success. For those who define life in terms of security, their suggestions for powerful influences focus on what they believe provides security. For those who define life in terms of relationship, their suggestions for powerful influences focus on influential relationships.

A second question: "What should be people's most powerful influences in life?" This is not the same question. What are the most powerful influences in a person's life frequently are not what should be the most powerful influences in a person's life.

Today is Father's Day. Too often, it is the traditional time to fulfill an obligation. It may or may not be a time to express deeply felt love and appreciation. I would like to make an observation. A father should be one of the most powerful, positive influences in each person's life. Unfortunately, in far too many situations, a father is one of the most powerful negative influences in many people's lives.

This morning I encourage us men to understand the power of a father's influence.

- I. **For a foundation, I will use what I regard to be one of Jesus' most powerful parables--a parable very relevant to today's life circumstances.**
 - A. **The parable is the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15.**
 1. Most of us are quite familiar with the story.
 - a. A rebellious son demanded his inheritance and left home to get as far away from his family and their influence as possible.
 - b. For a while, he lived it up, and as he did he attracted people who were more than happy to party with him.
 - c. Then the economy collapsed, and he was broke in a place experiencing a severe depression.
 - d. He soon was in desperate circumstances, and no one cared if he lived or died.
 - e. He found himself doing a job he would never consider in the past, and the job did not pay him enough to eat.

- f. One day he realized his horrible mistakes, his stupidity, and decided to return home and ask his father to let him be a servant.
 - g. In his own evaluation, being a servant was the only consideration he should expect.
 - h. He returned, and his father, with love and rejoicing, welcomed him as a son.
2. Most of the time when we consider this parable we focus on the rebellious son who repented.
- a. Sometimes we focus on the older brother who was not happy for his brother to return home.
 - b. This morning I want you to consider the father.
- B. Obviously, we are talking about the father of a grown son.**
- 1. There are four things I want you to notice about this father.
 - 2. First, he knew when to turn loose.
 - a. When the rebellious son turned loose of him, he let the son leave.
 - i. I see no indication that he let the son leave because the father did not care or found relief in the fact the boy was gone.
 - a. The fact that he did not stop looking for the boy to come back certainly is evidence that he cared deeply (Luke 15:20).
 - b. The welcome he gave his returning son certainly is evidence of his love (Luke 15:20-24).
 - ii. He did not allow the son to leave because he did not care or did not love; he let the son leave because the son's heart and love were already gone.
 - b. It takes a great deal of wisdom to know how to care, how to love, and still turn loose.
 - i. The temptation is to hold on to a child that you love "until he or she comes to his or her senses."
 - ii. The temptation is to believe that your control is the solution to the problem.
 - a. There certainly are ages when constructive control founded on love and concern is what our children need.
 - b. There is also an age when constructive control accomplishes nothing.
 - iii. It takes great wisdom to know when that time comes, but it is that wisdom that helps the father be a powerful, positive influence.

- c. When the rebellious son left, the father knew a special sense of grief.
 - i. When our children reach the age to knowingly rebel against us, it is natural to feel that we failed as a father.
 - ii. It must have been very difficult to watch that son leave knowing he might never see him again.
 - iii. It must have been horrible to endure day after day of not knowing where his son was or what his son's situation was.
- 3. Second, even though he turned loose of a rebellious son and that son left, he was a positive force in the son's life.
 - a. His son rejected him.
 - b. His son deserted him.
 - c. His son abandoned the way of life that the father knew was best.
 - d. If we consider only those things, we would conclude the father was no influence at all in the son's life, and certainly not a positive influence.
 - e. Yet, there is one other factor we must see.
 - i. When the consequences of his mistakes and foolish decisions caught up with him, the son thought of his father and home (Luke 15:17-19).
 - ii. When his own decisions and actions broke him, he remembered home.
 - iii. He remembered home because of his father.
 - iv. In all he did to disappoint and hurt his father, going home was an option.
 - a. It was not a means of escaping responsibility for his decisions and actions.
 - b. It was an option in accepting responsibility for his decisions and actions.
 - f. The important thing I want you to see is this: it was an option because of his father's positive influence in his life.
- 4. The third thing I want you to see is this: the father's love for his son never died.
 - a. He hoped his son would someday come home.
 - i. He hoped his son's memories would bring him back.
 - ii. It was not a control issue; it was a love issue.
 - iii. It was not an "I told you do" issue; it was a loving relationship issue.
 - iv. It was not because he "wanted to be right"; it was because he loved his son.

- b. To me, the evidence of the father's incredible love is seen in a simple statement: when he looked down the road and saw his son in the distance, he recognized his son.
 - i. The ordeal the son experienced as a consequence of his own choices and behavior was severe.
 - ii. That severe ordeal had to impact that young man's appearance in every way.
 - iii. Yet, the father recognized his son when he saw him.
- 5. The fourth thing I want you to note about the father is this: he knew how to extend encouragement and welcome when his son had been defeated.
 - a. There was no "come to me on my terms"; there was a joyful reunion.
 - b. There was no lecture; there was a kiss.
 - c. There was no desire to make him suffer; there was a desire for the boy to know the father wanted him as a son.
 - d. There was no mourning for all that was wasted; there was immediate rejoicing.
 - e. Repentance had changed his son.
 - f. Coming home had changed his son.
 - g. The rebellious son who left home was dead.
 - h. The son he loved was alive.
- 6. In my understanding, those four factors made the father a powerful influence.
 - a. He knew when to turn loose.
 - b. Even though he turned loose, he was a positive force in his son's life.
 - c. His love for his son never died.
 - d. He knew how to encourage and welcome his son when he came home.

C. In the parable, the father represents God.

- 1. Fathers, we represent God in ways a mother never can.
 - a. There are avenues of influence mothers have in their children's lives that fathers do not have.
 - b. However, we fathers are God's representatives in a special way.
- 2. "That does not make sense; a person is a person; a human influence is a human influence."
 - a. Persons who struggle with their fathers, who feel rejected by their fathers, who feel abandoned and unloved by their fathers frequently struggle in their relationship with God.

- b. One of the common images of God in the Bible is God the Father.
- c. When a person has deep, negative feelings about his or her father, he or she often transfers those feelings to God.
- 3. It is extremely important for Christian fathers to be a powerful, positive influence in the lives of their children.

II. Now, I want to speak briefly to everyone, men and women.

A. In the parable of the prodigal son, the father symbolizes God.

- 1. Jesus gave the parable to teach some primary lessons about the power and effectiveness of repenting.
- 2. A basic lesson concerning repentance is taught in the son's "coming to himself" and returning to his father.

B. Regardless of the kind of father you have or the negative influences that exist in your life because of your father, God loves you.

- 1. God loves you enough to turn you loose and let you "do your own thing."
 - a. That is not what He wants, but he will turn loose and allow you to do as you wish and choose.
 - b. If you belong to God, it will be because you return God's love and you are in relationship with God by choice.
- 2. God wants to be the most positive, beneficial force in your life.
 - a. He seeks only your good.
 - b. He knows what will destroy you.
 - c. But He will not force you to do His will, even though it is best for you.
- 3. Even if you rebel against and abandon God, God's love for you will not die.
 - a. He will not stop loving you.
 - b. He will not stop hoping you by choice will turn to Him.
 - c. As long as you live, he will not stop looking for you to return.
- 4. When you come to him, not matter what has happened in your life, He knows how to welcome and encourage you.
 - a. He wants you as part of His family.
 - b. When you return to Him, He will never be ashamed of you.

One of the most difficult challenges in life is to accept love. The greater our struggles and the deeper our troubles, the harder it becomes to accept love.

God wants us to know His love is there. "Will God forgive me?" is never an issue. "Will God love me?" is never an issue. The only issues are these: will you accept the love? Will you accept the forgiveness?