

Divine Fatherhood

By
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So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

-Genesis 1:27

Last month, in celebration of Mother's day, we looked at the significance of Genesis 1:27 in relation to motherhood. In that paper we explored the idea that to be made in the image of God, among other things, means that mankind exists to reflect the invisible attributes of God to the visible universe. Since this verse says specifically that both men and women bear this image of God, that means that each gender was created by God to reflect a different aspect of His divine character. And since our genders reach the fullness of their expression in parenthood, motherhood and fatherhood, more than anything else, reflects specific character qualities of God. Last month we looked at the maternal elements of God's nature, this month we will look at the paternal elements of God's nature.

The Danger Of Fatherhood

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."

-Ephesians 6:4

As with motherhood, since fatherhood is such a supreme good that, when corrupted, it can become a supreme evil. In the above passage, the apostle Paul acknowledges that, in a unique way, fatherhood can bring children up in "the training and admonition of the Lord." However, Paul also acknowledges that when fathers fail in their role, they can uniquely provoke their children to wrath. There are many who can attest to the damage done to them by bad fathers, and there aren't many wounds that cut deeper than the wounds left by a father. We will explore the reasons for this in greater detail as we go, but it is always important to keep in mind that it isn't fatherhood itself that is bad, merely the perversion of it.

Criticizing Fatherhood

Unfortunately, we live in a society that is in the grip of a revolutionary spirit. This means that many people in the past few decades, many well meaning, but some malicious in their intent, have tried to build a more just and equitable society by criticizing the structure that came before. Since men sit at the top of that structure, they became the supreme target for the progressive ire, and as such, fathers have come under intense scrutiny and ridicule.

This is why in most media in the last fifty years or so, the worst elements of fatherhood have been highlighted and the best elements have been largely ignored, or downplayed. In most recent sitcoms, fathers are portrayed as bumbling goofs, and in countless movies, the fathers depicted are absent, abusive, neglectful, harsh, vile, controlling, and so on. It is very rare to find any recent film in which a good father is actually portrayed.

Just to take two recent examples for the sake of brevity, Moana and Frozen, both films that I genuinely enjoyed, show the female protagonists being held back by the misguided advice of their fathers. In Frozen, Elsa's dad fears her power and makes her afraid of it as well, this causes her to isolate herself and repress her powers, until she is able to be set free from her fears by her sister. In Moana, the father makes Moana afraid of leaving the island, and it is her grandmother that sets her on the correct path. While the fathers in these films are not the villains, they are still seen as hindrances to the protagonists growth and not as a benefit.

Classic Disney films, as well as the fairy tales that they were based on, would criticize the excesses of both motherhood and fatherhood, but they would also glorify the ideal versions of motherhood and fatherhood. This gave us something to try to avoid, as well as a goal to shoot for. Modern movies don't show ideal fatherhood, at best they show fathers who recognize that their paternal role was damaging others and learn to allow the females around them to take the lead. This is not to say that fatherhood is perfect, as stated before, when fatherhood is corrupted it is one of the most damaging things on this earth. Only to say that when a culture only demonizes fatherhood, we are guaranteeing that men don't learn to take on the responsibility of correct fatherhood, and we also make it impossible for those who have been hurt by bad fathers to recover correctly from their mistreatment.

The Virtue Of Fatherhood

Let me quickly explain both of those points. First, since fatherhood is aiming at glorifying unique elements of God, this makes it a very difficult thing to do. The flesh of man

rebels against the reality of God and this means that the higher the virtue, the more difficult it is to train our souls to practice that virtue. We need a constant influx of encouragement, instruction, and good examples to manage even simple virtues like honesty and courage. When young men are given few examples of good fathers, little to no positive instruction or encouragement for being fathers, and are instead inundated with a constant influx of critiques of fatherhood, they are, (to put it mildly), ill-equipped to practice the high and lofty virtue of fatherhood. As these trends increase, it shouldn't surprise us that fatherhood is on a massive decline, which the statistics bear out for us:

“Unfortunately, broken families, fatherlessness, and the government stepping in to take over traditional parenting duties—like instilling values—are an increasingly common fact of life in America. According to data from 2022, there are approximately 18.3 million children across America who live without a father in the home, comprising about 1 in 4 children ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2022](#)). This number is a major international outlier, with the U.S. having the highest rate globally of children living in single-parent households ([Kramer, 2021](#)). As of 2019, a staggering 23% of children lived with one parent and no other adults, which was over three times the global average of 7%, according to Pew Research. In China and India, this number stands at 3% and 4%, respectively ([Kramer, 2021](#)). The statistics are even more staggering for black children, with nearly 50% living with a single mother (Livingston, 2018). Overall, single mothers head up 80% of single-parent households ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2022](#)). Sadly, fatherless families are four times more likely to raise children in poverty ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2020](#)), and research suggests that 84% of homeless families are headed by women ([ACOG, 2021](#)).”

-Jack Brewer - “Fatherlessness and its effects on American society”

Second, by failing to exalt positive fatherhood, we have prevented those who have been damaged by their fathers from appropriately healing. This might seem like a counterintuitive point. Common sense might teach some that the best way to help someone who has been hurt by a father figure is to tell them that fatherhood itself isn't that good and so they didn't really miss out on anything important. However the opposite is true.

“I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,” Says the LORD Almighty.”

-2 Corinthians 6:18

A crucial element of God's character is His Fatherhood. This means that, as His children, we were built to receive love from God as our heavenly Father, and this love is meant to be first experienced by our earthly fathers. This means that if someone is

denied this love by their earthly father, this isn't something superfluous that they can simply "get over", but something fundamental to the development of their soul. The reality of our foundational need for paternal love is borne out by the negative statistics of those who are denied this, here are just a few:

"Criminal activity and fatherlessness are closely related as well. Most adolescents who enter the justice system have suffered from parental abandonment, substance abuse, or a dysfunctional household. In a study of 75 juvenile delinquents, 66% experienced fatherlessness, 20% had never lived with their father, and 25% had an alcoholic father ([Kofler-Westergren, Klopf, Bernhard, 2010](#)). Some data suggests that children without fathers in the home are 279% more likely to carry guns and deal drugs compared to peers living with their fathers ([Allen, Lo, 2010](#)). In one study, 70% of youth in state-operated facilities were from sing-parent homes ([Beck, Kline, Greenfeld, 1987](#)). On the whole, some data suggests that fatherless kids are 20 times more likely to be incarcerated ([Seidel, 2022](#)). Other data suggests that children who are close to their fathers are 80% less likely to spend time in jail ([The Fatherhood Project](#)). Moreover, 71% of teachers and 90% of law enforcement officials state that the lack of parental supervision at home is a major factor that contributes to violence in schools ([Maginnis, 1997](#)). In a study of 56 school shootings, only 10 of the shooters (18%) were raised in a stable home with both biological parents. 82% grew up in either an unstable family environment or grew up without both biological parents together ([Langman, P. 2016](#))."

-Jack Brewer - "Fatherlessness and its effects on American society"

Mourning Leads To Joy

The above stats pertain only to criminality, but in almost every facet of life, those who are denied positive fatherly affection perform worse than those who have received this blessing. This doesn't mean that someone can't heal from this lack, but healing must begin with acknowledged grief, not denial.

"Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy."
-Psalm 126:5

For some, this grieving process will be natural, and happen gradually, maybe even subconsciously. But for others, this grieving process will be more severe, and they might perpetually wrestle with God's fatherly role within their lives.

For this reason, I do counsel people like this to leave God's fatherly love to the side for a time while they heal, but this isn't something that they should do indefinitely. Eventually they will need to grieve properly for what their earthly fathers did to them, and they have to relearn what true paternal love is. By doing this, they can experience

the immense joy of being loved by God as their heavenly Father. If they can't do this, they are cut off from one of the most precious elements of their relationship with God.

Also, if the person hurt is a male, they need to learn how to be a Godly father. Even if they don't become a biological father, although I do believe this is a good goal for any man to have, they will still have a paternal role within their communities and their families. If they are a female, they should aim to marry a Godly man who will become a Godly father. All of these things are only possible if, as a culture, we have good examples of Fatherhood that can help those hurt by their fathers to relearn what Godly fatherhood is all about. This will help those who are hurt to correctly grieve over their own failed relationships with their fathers, to learn what it truly means that God loves them as their heavenly father, prepare men to become Godly fathers, and women to be attracted to men who can become Godly fathers. With all that being said, let's now talk about some of the glories contained in fatherly love.

Godly Discipline

“And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.” If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?”

-Hebrews 12:5-7

One of the most important facets of paternal love is discipline. In our modern culture, for many of the reasons I have already spelled out, the concept of discipline is under strict scrutiny. In fact, many today believe that discipline is actually a bad thing. They believe that parenthood isn't really about morally forming the child, but instead encouraging the natural goodness of the child to come to the surface. This bad philosophy has many terrible sources that I don't have time to go into right now, but its first, most ardent defense came from a French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the late 17th century:

Let us lay it down as an incontrovertible rule that the first impulses of nature are always right; there is no original sin in the human heart, the how and why of the entrance of every vice can be traced. The only natural passion is self-love or selfishness taken in a wider sense. This selfishness is good in itself and in relation to ourselves; and as the child has no necessary relations to other people he is naturally indifferent to them; his self-love only becomes good or bad by the use made of it and the relations established by its means.

-Jean-Jacques Rousseau - Emile

This belief system has unfortunately grown in popularity since he first penned those words. And the logical inference from his ideas is that any discipline is actually a bad thing, your child is naturally good and therefore any problems that emerge from them are a result of oppression or low self-esteem. Modern westerners have bought into this idea in large numbers, take just one quote from the current Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota, Peggy Flanagan:

“When our children tell us who they are, it is our job as grown ups to listen and to believe them, that's what it means to be a parent.”

According to this ideology, parenting is not about disciplining your children and helping their moral formation, it is instead a process of listening so that your child can tell you who they want to be. This is again, a not so subtle attack on fatherhood itself, but it is also a very unbiblical idea.

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.”
-Psalm 51:5

It is true that we are created in the image of God and therefore are formed with inherent worth and goodness. However, this image has been marred by the fall from Eden. This means that our nature is a combination of good and sinful instincts, and it is the job of the parent to morally form their children in order to encourage the good, and to curb the bad impulses.

“He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.”
-Proverbs 13:24

Biblically, the act of discipline is both godly and loving, and as such children are damaged when proper discipline is not given to them. Which raises the questions, what is the goal of proper discipline, and why are fathers specifically designed for this role?

Proper Discipline

“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him.”
-Proverbs 22:15

The book of Proverbs lays out for the Biblical conception of wisdom and why it is so important. For the sake of this paper, I will give an overly simplified definition of Biblical wisdom that is given to us through many verses of Scripture. According to the Bible, God organized the creation in His own image, meaning that nature itself reflects aspects of God's character and functions according to His being. And this remains the case even in a fallen world. This means that when someone fails to act in a way that honors the characteristics of God, there are natural consequences to this behavior that we will experience as a result. This isn't the same thing as divine judgment at violating God's moral order, though they are linked, this is instead a natural consequence that flows from violating God's created order. Therefore, a simple definition of wisdom would be, an understanding and respect for God's natural order.

To use a simple example, a fundamental force of nature is gravity. While it isn't a violation of the moral order for me to try to defy gravity, it is a violation of the natural order and I will suffer a natural consequence for not living in accordance with the laws of gravity. Therefore, such an action wouldn't be rightly called "sin" but "foolishness". The whole point of the book of Proverbs is to try to show us what the natural order is in basically every facet of life that we might walk according to sound wisdom and honor God's natural law as well as His moral one. What this Proverb teaches us is that children are not born with innate knowledge of the natural order.

They are too young and immature to understand that hard work, courage, integrity, fiscal responsibility, and self-control are not merely good virtues, but they are integral to God's character and therefore they are woven into the natural order. If someone were to deny any of these things, if they were to for instance behave cowardly or slothfully, they will experience natural consequences of pushing people away from them and severely diminishing their opportunities in life. Unfortunately, children are not old enough to understand abstract consequences like this, and so, even if I were to explain to a 5 year old that they shouldn't act selfishly otherwise no one will want to be their friend, such a lesson would go over their head.

What discipline does is manifest an immediate, concrete consequence that acts as an instructor for the child to begin to understand more abstract, long-term consequences. When a parent puts their child in time out for stealing another kid's toys, this punishment in itself won't drive out the selfishness of the child, but it will at least restrain the behavior while the lesson is being slowly taught to the child's conscience through the law. In order for this to happen though, the end of discipline is that the child learns the natural law, not that the child acts rightly because they fear the parent.

"Your own wickedness will correct you, And your backslidings will rebuke you."

-Jeremiah 2:19

This also means that as the child is growing up, the parent won't just discipline personally, but they also must commit themselves to not saving their child from a natural consequence. To give an example, if a kid is obnoxious and rude on the playground, a natural consequence of this behavior is that no other kids will want to play with them. In this case, discipline would not be to ground your child for their behavior, but instead it would be to explain the natural consequence to your child and help them understand and practice behavior that would attract friends to them. If instead, the parent yells at the other kids for ostracizing their child, or talks to the other parents, or school administrators for the same reason, they are not allowing their child to learn the lesson and they are guaranteeing that their kid will remain unlikable for the rest of their lives.

Since the goal of discipline is for the child to learn the natural law, this should help us see what the healthy boundaries of discipline should be, and for the sake of brevity I will only lay out a couple. First, if the discipline is done primarily out of irritation at your own child, you will most likely demean your child and/or fail to teach them the lesson. Second, discipline should be the lowest necessary force to teach your child the lesson. There are some kids who are temperamentally more obedient, some are naturally more stubborn and obstinate. It makes no sense to discipline them the same, since a stern lecture might be sufficient for a more obedient child, while nothing short of a spanking would suffice for a stubborn child.

Finally, the natural consequence can't be too damaging, otherwise they will be too crushed to learn the lesson. If your child is being relentlessly bullied at school, it doesn't make much sense to let that continue in order to teach your child to be more self-reliant or tough. There are limits that you must be aware of, otherwise the damage done to your child will be too much and not only will they not learn the lesson, but they will be permanently damaged by your negligence. All of these boundaries are difficult to find correct balance, and that is why it is best to actually discuss discipline with your spouse, but also with trusted family members and friends, especially ones who have older kids than you.

Fatherly Discipline

"Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

-Hebrews 12:9-11

Why does the Bible automatically ascribe discipline to the fatherly role? As mentioned in my paper about motherhood, because mothers must bear their children in their wombs and nurse them on their bodies, God has designed them to be incredibly empathetic. This empathy drives them to intuitively understand the needs of their children and to be driven to meet those needs instantly. Fathers are designed in the opposite way. It's not that they are without empathy, but simply that their empathy is much less potent than the mother's. This means that the average father doesn't have a visceral reaction to their kid's pain the way that mothers do. A father can listen to their child cry and not feel pained by this, they can even ignore it if they want to. This means that when a father sees their child experiencing a natural consequence, it is much easier for them to not interfere, and it is also much easier for them to withstand the pang in their hearts when they cause their children pain through discipline.

This is where the real difficulty lies. As you can see, this means that fatherhood is much more readily described as a complement to motherhood than the other way around. Not only because motherhood comes first, (it is the mother who bonds with the child in the womb, not the father), but also because the child is not ready for discipline until they are close to a year old. During the first couple months of life, it is right for the mother to respond to every immediate need of their child and try their best to mitigate any discomfort. However, after the first few months, children gain the ability to morally develop. Their personality traits begin to come to the surface, some good, some not so good, and they are ready to be trained.

At first this training is really basic and can't be enforced too harshly, it might simply be trying to teach your kid the word "no" through restraining them from touching breakable or dangerous objects. But then this progresses to time-outs, groundings, and, in some circumstances, mild physical discipline like spanking. But this must be done in concert with maternal love, not in opposition to it. Fathers have a tendency to push their kids too hard, and not express enough love or affection for their children. As such, while they succeed in disciplining their children, they do it in such a way that their kids feel as though they are only loved by their fathers when they are acting appropriately.

To put it another way, maternal love is unconditional and provides a child with a sense of security and comfort. Whereas paternal love is encouraging love, it brings out the potential of a child through discipline and training. When maternal love is out of balance, the children end up being smothered, when paternal love is out of balance, the children are pushed too hard and don't experience warmth or affection. Some couples try to artificially balance each other out. So the wife will become more coddling to her children

to try to balance out her husband's harshness, and the husband will become increasingly harsh to balance out his wife's pampering.

However, when a couple recognizes their spouse's role as complimentary, they will negotiate the best way to provide their children with both, and they will begin to teach each other how to incorporate more of the other's type of love. Ideally this means that the husband will learn to become more empathetic and compassionate towards their children, and the wife will learn how to be more stern and less coddling in her parenting. In our culture, in the past, it was fatherly love that was out of balance and that is why so many kids had the experience of harsh childhoods. But in the modern day it is maternal love that is more out of balance. This is why so many kids today are over parented and under disciplined. They are comforted and assured, but they aren't trained up, so they become entitled, emotionally fragile, undisciplined, and anxious. It is the properly balanced paternal love, expressed through discipline, that helps a child truly grow up.

Controlling Power

“My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother; For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, And chains about your neck. My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. If they say, “Come with us, Let us lie in wait to shed blood; Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause...”

-Proverbs 1:8-11

In the above passage, a father is warning his son about the allure of power as a means to take what you want. In our current culture, people are being taught that men and women are essentially interchangeable, and that all of our desires were given to us by society. When feminists argue that our society is sexist they tend to point to the lack of women in high powered positions. When some point out that not as many women want these high powered positions, they retort that this is because girls have been raised to be more docile and less ambitious. This is demonstrably untrue. The most relevant data that we have on this issue comes from the Nordic countries where gender equality has been most emphasized and has been in place since the 1960's. If the feminists were correct, you would see a relatively even distribution amongst all occupations, but instead you see the opposite:

“In Denmark for instance over 60% of all workers are employed in a profession where their own sex accounts for 75% or more. Women mainly work in the public sector, often with education, care or health, while the private sector is dominated by men who often work with production and engineering. Gender segregation exists at all educational levels. Even when a woman and a man have the same educational background,

research indicates that the most likely scenario is that the woman will end up working in the public sector and the man in the private sector.”

-Astrid Elkjær Sørensen - “Gender segregation in the Nordic labor market”

The Draw of Power

Instead of gender equality closing the gap between men and women, it seems to have widened it. The reason is that our fundamental desires are tied to our nature, not just our nurture. Women were designed by God to be the primary nurturers of their children. This doesn't mean that there aren't some more ambitious women, but it does mean that, when given the option, women are going to be attracted to careers that are more nurturing, like nursing and teaching. Whereas men are designed by God to be the primary providers and protectors of their families. This doesn't mean that there won't be men who are more nurturing in their temperaments, only that men are going to naturally attract to careers that are less nurturing and more oriented towards harnessing power. This is why men are attracted to jobs in finance and leadership, but it also accounts for why men are more interested in being cops, firefighters, and construction workers.

This is all related to the ultimate expression of our genders in parenthood. The women cultivate and nurture life growing within them, while men train up and shape life when it comes into the world. This is why men are drawn to careers in which they are building the world around them and protecting that world from threats. While women are more interested in jobs that put them in contact with others so that they use their innate compassion and empathy to help others grow and heal. Because we have seen what corrupted power can do though, most people in our culture are wary of innate aggression and power that is within boys.

This is why so many today try to prevent boys from playing rough, and instead try to shape them into more nurturing and compassionate individuals. They truly believe that aggression is not innate, but instead is taught, and therefore, if we prevent boys from this type of play, we will remove the misuse of power and therefore, all forms of oppression.

“The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him. The LORD is a man of war; The LORD is His name.”

-Exodus 15:2-3

The problem with this theory is that, like the previous one, it is false. Power dynamics among humans are not the result of corrupting cultures, or “the patriarchy”. Instead, it descends from God Himself who is all powerful, and even contains a power structure

within Himself. The Father is the head of the trinity, and the Son and the Spirit are submissive to Him. This power structure is not oppressive, but instead functions as means of the mutual glorification of the Godhead through love:

“While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”

-Matthew 17:5

The Father doesn't use His power to oppress the Son, nor does He use it to overshadow Him. Instead, He uses His power to glorify His Son, and the Son submits to the Father in order to glorify Him. This is the true, Godly purpose for power. The strong are to use their power to support, protect, and encourage the weak. We unfortunately live in a very dangerous and cruel world. While it has been made much less dangerous, thanks to the efforts and sacrifices of our ancestors, the fact remains that every single one of us lives in the shadow of our own mortality. So, while power can, and often is, used to oppress others, it can also be used to protect and exalt those around us.

When power is pursued as an end unto itself then this point is negated. Since men naturally want to pursue power and prestige, it is easy for them, especially from the older generation, to neglect their families and over-work. They think that they are fulfilling their role by merely providing for the needs of their children, but they don't see that so much more is needed of them. Instead of seeing their power and their career as something that supports their family, they see their family as supporting their career. They think their wife is there merely to watch the kids so that they can chase their dreams. The opposite is true. The Father doesn't see His role as being merely one of “providing” for His Son, but in actively supporting and exalting Him. The role of the father could not be filled with mere financial help, it is multi-faceted and all important.

However, since power dynamics are innate in our current world, all attempts to get rid of them only assure the rise of truly tyrannical personalities. After all, this was the naive promise of Marxism. Marx contested that there are only two types of people in this world, the oppressors and the oppressed. Since the oppressors have gotten that way through oppressing others, they are corrupt and the cause for all suffering in our societies. So if only the oppressed could rise up and supplant the oppressors, the world would turn into a wonderful Utopia free from power dynamics in which everyone would serve each other *“From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”* (Karl Marx).

This did not happen. Instead the truly power hungry and malicious individuals in these Communist revolutions rose to prominence and killed their way to the top in the name of Utopia. Marx was wrong, you can't get rid of power dynamics because they are innate in human nature. When people, especially young men, are not taught to deny their strength for the benefit of others, tyrannical men tend to fill the void. This is one reason why the increase of fatherlessness results in more crime. When fathers don't teach their sons how to restrain their power, young men are drawn to more aggressive, malicious individuals who instead teach them to cultivate their power to take what they want.

"And if you think tough men are dangerous, wait until you see what weak men are capable of."

-Jordan Peterson - 12 Rules For Life

Disciplining Power

"He who has a generous eye will be blessed, For he gives of his bread to the poor."

-Proverbs 22:9

Since men naturally struggle with more aggression than women, and are more drawn to power than women, fathers are best equipped at showing others how to appropriately use their power. This is partly going to happen through example and instruction, but mostly this instruction is through the encouragement of rough play. If you were to walk in on a mother playing with their kids, you would probably find them reading them stories, playing with dolls, or coloring. If you were to walk in on a father playing with their kids, they would probably be wrestling them, chasing them around the house, or throwing them in the air. This may not seem significant, but it actually is. Maternal play helps kids grow their imaginations and social skills, while paternal play helps kids learn to control their aggression and their strength.

When a father plays with their kids, they have to seriously restrain themselves, otherwise they would do genuine damage to their children. Also, by wrestling with their kids, and encouraging them to play rough with one another, fathers show their children how to play fair, and what kinds of aggression are playful versus harmful. To use a simple example, if you ever watch puppies play with one another, it is this kind of rough play. They wrestle with each other, and even bite one another. But in this playing they learn to restrain themselves and control their aggression. If you were to buy a puppy that didn't have this kind of play, they will play far too rough. They will bite too hard, and even tackle unsuspecting kids because they don't know how to control their own aggression. It's not discipline that these dogs lacked, but play.

Who is strong? He who conquers his evil inclination, as it is said: 'Better is one slow to anger than a strong man, and one who rules over his spirit than a conqueror of a city' (Proverbs 16:32).

-Mishna chapter 4, 1(a)

Biblically, the true exercise of power is over one's own soul. But this isn't something that is primarily taught, it is something that must be shown. I pointed out play because this is the primary teacher of young children, but this happens by example in all things. The father must demonstrate to his family, through self sacrifice and restraint of his temper, how to truly be a man and exercise power in self-control and towards the benefit of others. The most amazing thing about our faith, is that the ultimate expression of divine power was not in creation or destruction, but in the cross.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

-1 Corinthians 1:18

Conquering Fear

"And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! "Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"

-Numbers 14:2-3

In this particular story, the fathers of Israel failed in their responsibilities to their children and were kept out of the promised land as a consequence. In the previous chapters, Israel had sent spies into the promised land to be able to see what the land had to offer them. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, brought back a good report, but the other ten stirred up fear and panic over the inhabitants of the land and here they tried to create a rebellion against God and Moses so that they could return to Egypt. In order to justify their cowardice, they project their fears onto their children and claim that they aren't willing to fight in order to "protect" their wives and children, when in reality, it was their own fears that prevented them from acting. God sees right through their claims and responds like this:

"...because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not

heeded My voice, “they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.”

-Numbers 14:22-23

Because mothers are designed by God to be attentive towards the fragility of their children, they have a tendency to be overprotective and anxious about the health and well-being of their children. Men on the other hand tend to be less affected by worry, and therefore have a more innate desire for their kids to be independent and courageous. Because of this, when fathers see their children consumed with fear, the role of the good father is to help them conquer their fear and experience true courage.

Recklessness Versus True Courage

But, like everything else in parenting, this strength from men had to be the complement to the nurturing care of the mothers. Traditionally the danger was that men have a tendency to be reckless. They don't always consider consequences to their actions, and they are rarely very circumspect in their planning and preparation. This meant that the main danger from fathers is that they would be too reckless in their parenting, assuming that their children are ready for dangers that they might not be, they weren't as watchful as they should be, and were usually unprepared for difficulties when they arose. Ideally, this meant that as the father learned from their wife's caution, the wife learned to relax control over their children to give a good balanced approach to parenting, in which the children would be protected from serious injury, but would be allowed to develop courage and independence in moderately dangerous play.

Like in the previous point, children don't learn courage simply from being told about the benefits of courage, they learn courage through risky play. Kids challenge themselves and others when they go to playgrounds or play sports. In play, they learn how to overcome obstacles and fear. But they won't do this if their parents are hovering over their shoulders at all times. If a child becomes afraid and knows that their parents will immediately pull them out of discomfort when they cry, they will never face their fears.

It is only when parents distance themselves, that a child can learn to push themselves past their fears and learn to achieve legitimate growth and confidence. It is predominantly men who are less negatively affected by their anxiety who can allow their kids to engage in risky play without feeling the pull to “rescue” them out of danger. Mothers on the other hand have a much more difficult time allowing their kids to face danger without swooping in to help them.

This is one of the big problems with our modern culture. We have gone so long with fatherhood being attacked, that most dad's today have been raised in our overly

anxious culture. As a result, most dads are either passive and distant from their kids, or they are just as anxious as the mothers. This lack of true paternal care has led to the most anxious generations ever. The Millennial generation, as well as Gen Z, and Gen Alpha are all experiencing record levels of anxiety. They are afraid of the world and are risk averse. Not only are they being “rescued” from all danger and discomfort, they are also taught to constantly focus on their feelings. When a child is crying, a mother’s reaction is to comfort them, a traditional father’s reaction is to tell the kid to “walk it off”.

When kids get past a certain age, you realize that the vast majority of times that a kid cries, it is for attention, not because they actually need help. When we are genuinely in distress, we need comfort to help us heal and move forward. But kids don’t yet know the difference between a real need, and a desire for attention. If parents give attention and comfort to every tear that a child sheds, they will make their kids self-focused, which leads them to experience negative emotion at a much higher level. Most of the time, discomfort can be ignored, and by ignoring it, we learn to become resilient.

Taken to an extreme, this principle can make people uncompassionate and emotionally vacant, which is why the maternal must complement the paternal. But, in proper proportion, this can teach a child to know the difference between an emotion that can be ignored, and one that needs to be attended to, as well as which risks are worth taking, and which ones are not. The result will be a much more courageous and independent person, if this doesn’t happen, the result will be an overly anxious and sensitive adult in a perpetual state of arrested development. This is problematic because all the most important things in life can only be gained through courage. It takes a large amount of courage to ask someone out for the first time, to learn to drive, to go to a job interview, to enter into conflict with a friend or spouse, and many other essential things in life.

Risks Worth Taking

Take a look at this playground built in the early 1900’s to further illustrate this point:



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Many parents today cringe at the lack of “safety features” present in this playground equipment. We want to save our children from risk, not comprehending that life is risk. You can’t remove the risk of everyday life, and dangerous play like this is designed to make kids face danger and overcome it. By removing risk from our kids' play, we aren’t making them more safe, but less competent. The current generations don’t know which risks are worth taking, and so they don’t take any risks and instead have retreated to the digital world.

Fewer and fewer members of the current generations are getting married, learning to drive, entering into careers, moving out of the house, and much more, (If you want to look at numerous studies showing this go to <https://www.anxiousgeneration.com/research/notes-and-figures>).

Many today blame things like Covid or climate change, but the simple fact is that we have made the same mistake as the Israelites in the book of Numbers. Instead of learning to conquer our own fears, we are instead projecting them onto our kids and preventing them from growing up.

Joshua and True Courage

After the generation of fathers who had been consumed by their fears had passed away, Joshua, Caleb, and the rest of the Israelites were allowed to enter the promised land. In Joshua's first teaching to the people of Israel before they invaded the land he says:

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

-Joshua 1:9

Joshua is not teaching his people to be reckless or live in denial of genuine dangers. He acknowledges that they are facing genuine threats in invading the land. He is merely arguing that because God was with them and for them, they should be able to face their fears in the confidence of God. Here we see the perfect balance that allows for us to have courage in our daily lives.

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son. As they called them, So they went from them; They sacrificed to the Baals, And burned incense to carved images. "I taught Ephraim to walk, Taking them by their arms; But they did not know that I healed them. I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them."

-Hosea 11:1-4

In this passage, God exemplifies both the maternal and paternal aspects of love that allow for genuine courage. When He speaks of drawing them "with gentle cords, with bands of love." God is exemplifying the maternal aspects of love. He has unconditional love for His people that provides them with a zone of safety. We can know that God is with us and for us, that He will provide us with everything we need to fulfill what He has in store for us. God cares about our lives and has plans for our future.

And when God teaches them how to walk by "taking them by the arms" He is exemplifying paternal love. It is the paternal love that pushes us outside our comfort zone and teaches us to do things that we didn't previously know. God does not just love His people as we are, He also is pushing us towards our potential in Him. This is the balance that parents can aim for in order to produce courage in their children. We are to provide a zone of safety and protection to help a child know that they aren't facing their problems alone. But we also give our kids a push to let them know that they have to face their fears and learn to walk on their own. It is this wonderful balance that allows for our kids to thrive, and for us to glorify our beautiful Father in heaven.

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

-1 John 3:1-3