

PREFACE: MY PURPOSE

The magnificent obsession of Jesus the Messiah is that all of humanity would know God as a Father. To overemphasize the importance of the Fatherhood of God would be impossible. It is one of the principal revelations of the New Testament (New Covenant), and a central theme of Jesus' message. I am aware that numerous books have been written on the subject of fathers. Many of these contain great insight and are useful resources for us. Nevertheless, I have chosen to address this theme again, because I believe that my approach to the subject of fatherhood requires a paradigm shift. As we all know, when God wanted to reveal Himself as a father, He did not send a father, He sent His only begotten Son Jesus Christ.¹ Since Jesus Christ must always be the archetype for us, we are required to look at His example. **In this book, I will attempt to convince you that one becomes a father by setting an example as a son.** Primarily, therefore, I have attempted to address what is required of us as sons. As we begin, let me state that this is not a book about parenting.

The apostle Paul wrote, *"But in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son..."*² The definitive question in life for each of us is found in the words of this Son, *"Who do you say that I am?"*³ To enable us to know God as a Father, Jesus came as a Son. We must know Jesus Christ before we can know our Father God, because it is written, *"No one comes unto the Father but by Me."*⁴ If this book does not give a deeper revelation and appreciation for our Lord Jesus Christ, it will be of little value. As we come to know God as Father, it will help equip us to shape our personal life, structure our family and order the church. As we attempt to bring our personal lives, our families and the church into proper order, our Father can use us to positively influence and affect our respective communities and even the nations.

What you are about to read is comparable to the Cliff Notes of my lifelong journey. In writing this book, I am forever indebted to the inspiration, urging and encouragement of my wife Kathy, my sons Sean and Matt, and my 'spiritual sons and daughters' throughout the world. The hypothesis of this book has been tried and tested in the laboratory of life. Kathy and I have raised our two sons, with whom we have walked closely for the majority of four decades. Sean and Matt are married men and are fathers themselves. Their lives have demonstrated, authenticated and therefore validated what you are about to read. Having said this, however, allow me to concede a few things here.

¹ John 3:16

² Galatians 4:4

³ Matthew 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20

⁴ John 14:6

First, I am fully aware that the success of any endeavor, including raising children, is utterly and absolutely dependent on the grace of God our Father. There is no substitute for the unmerited and ill-merited favor of God. There is no formula to insure our success apart from it. Without God's grace, any suggestion or guarantee that this book will make you a successful father is absurd. The Scriptures tell us, "*God gives grace to the humble.*"⁵ Walking in humility simply puts us in the best position us to receive God's grace.

Secondly, Kathy must receive much of the credit for raising the boys, especially when they were young. As with most fathers who have young children, I was busy pursuing a career. In my case, I served as a high school athletic coach and teacher. In addition, I was providing pastoral oversight to a growing congregation. During this time, I set a goal to have a relationship with the boys that they would want to duplicate with their own children. Kathy left her career as a registered nurse to dedicate herself to being a homemaker, wife and mother. In my frequent absence, she was faithful to continue to knit the relationship of the boys and me together. Sharing the burden for the boys that I carried in my heart, she skillfully and carefully translated the message of fathers and sons to them.

Perhaps some of you who have selected this book, are familiar with its predecessor, Sonship: The Path to Fatherhood, which was first printed in May of 2001. It was laid out and written in the format of a seminar manual. Over the next five years, it went through many alterations, not only due to typographical errors but also due to additional content. To my surprise, the manual has been circulated on six continents, resulting in numerous opportunities for me to share on this subject. You may wonder why I have chosen to rewrite it. Since composing the manual, my prayer has been that God would give me, and therefore my readers, further revelation and deeper insights into the subject of fathers and sons. I believe that God answered my prayer. Furthermore, I have had the desire to make the material more readable by including personal experiences. This book is my endeavor to explore this theme more thoroughly, and to greatly expand and elaborate on the material found in that manual. Kathy summed up my effort in rewriting perfectly. She said it is like a tailor taking the suit of a small father, and trying to remake it to fit a larger son. I have attempted to carefully take each seam apart stitch by stitch, press each crease out, and even add some material, while making every effort to remain true to the original pattern.

As we begin our journey together, I feel it is essential and expedient for us to agree upon certain elemental criteria. It seems obvious to me, as we travel this path, that we are best served to be guided

⁵ James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5

by an identical map. The map I have chosen to use is the Bible. For me, the Bible stands alone as the ultimate source of authority and frame of reference for all of life and practice. The course for our journey will not be set using current sociological trends, cultural norms, popular practices or even church traditions, no matter how successful they might appear to be. We will not set our compass by opinion polls or Biblical commentaries. As a matter of fact, I have heard it said that the Bible can shed a lot of light on the commentaries.

I have chosen to use Jesus Christ as the utmost example and supreme standard for any revelation we discover on this journey. I think it would be futile to venture any further unless we agree to use the Bible and the example of Jesus Christ as our “global positioning system” to navigate this expedition. Let me assure you, this book is not meant to be a critique of the structure others might choose, but rather it is my sincere, even if inadequate attempt, to offer an alternative. Charles Simpson, whom I deeply respect as a mentor and friend, said, “We must not elevate criticism to the level of achievement.” Therefore, I invite you to join me in rediscovering what I believe is the Biblical model for fatherhood and sonship. **What I aspired to lay out in this book is not a program to be initiated; rather it is a lifestyle to be lived.**

For over three and a half decades, I have had the privilege of walking with Dan Wolfe. He has been a mentor, a pastor and a spiritual father to me, as well as many of my colleagues. He has walked before me as an example of integrity and faith. As I have focused on being a spiritual son to Dan, God has given me the privilege of sharing this message to many men and women around the world. As I have mentioned, that is the essence of this book; **we become fathers as we model sonship.**

Biblical truth is not something that can be merely studied and learned; it is completely dependent upon revelation. Every author or teacher who attempts to bring spiritual understanding faces one common and seemingly insurmountable obstacle. “*The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*”⁶ Biblical truth is much greater than information and concepts. Jesus did not simply say that He would give us or tell us the truth. He said, “*I am the truth.*”⁷ Biblical truth was incarnated and still remains embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. John stated, “... *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*”⁸ Jesus Christ came as the living truth, the Word of God. Even though I write this

⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:14

⁷ John 14:6

⁸ John 1:14

book and use many Scriptures to support my premise, the truth it contains will still require revelation from the Holy Spirit.

Finally, if what I have written is truth, it should give us a greater sense of freedom, since John wrote that the outcome of truth is freedom.⁹ Solomon, who was noted for his great wisdom, wrote, “*Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding. The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise son will be glad in him. Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her rejoice who gave birth to you. Give me your heart, my son, and let your eyes delight in my ways.*”¹⁰

In light of our total dependence on the gracious revelation of God, Paul’s prayer for the church in Ephesus expresses my heart’s desire: “*May the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ give to us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.*”¹¹

⁹ John 8:31-32

¹⁰ Proverbs 23:22-26

¹¹ Ephesians 1:17

