

~Other Speakers S-Z: Albert Zehr:

Reconnecting the Generations for the Promised Blessing

Few Fathers â€“ Many Orphans

The cry for Spiritual Fathers and Mothers is rising up all across the earth. Fathers have not learned how to be fathers, and children feel orphaned, misunderstood, deserted, and often even abused. Picture five young women living in another country, some young mothers called to be intercessors, meeting together each week to weep and pray. They feel alone and misunderstood. Shortly after Janet and I met them, they asked if we would join their prayer time. After a time of worship, they looked at us with tears in their eyes. â€œWould you be a father and mother to us? Could you pray for us and bless us?â€•

The Lordâ€™s overwhelming presence and the tears of these dear ones opened the doors of our hearts, and we felt the Fatherâ€™s love yearning to flow through us to these, His dear children. On that day the Lord gave us the following prayer. I share this as it dramatically portrays the generational disconnect and an example of steps toward recovery.

Dear Daddy, Father, God,

These precious children are bowing before you, desiring Your blessing, desiring Your love and protection. In a small way, we have to believe that You have delegated us somehow on Your behalf to convey Your love and Your blessing to them. I sense that each one of them is like a little bird in a nest, the minute they hear a stir or breeze, their mouths are open, hungry and yearning to have something deposited into their being. I pray that whatever we say or have said would be the pure food that would cause them to grow and not contaminate them, not limit them in any way or quench their spirit. Thank-you that each one has a desperate yearning to be used by You and to speak words for You.

I pray that You would grant them each an environment where they could learn, where they could practice, a place where they would not be stepped on or pushed aside. Meanwhile, give them the grace and the humility to learn and to have wisdom. If their word is not received, let them know that Your blessing does not vary whether men or women receive us.

You have brought each one into this room with a common heart and a common purpose, and any natural desire is being washed away day by day. Father, I pray that the tears of these would become the DNA of the river that is flowing through this land. And so, through these prayers and these tears, this intercessory heart will be multiplied over and over. (Many tears are flowing.) Even if none of them ever become public or no one ever knows, You, Father, record not only their names in Your book, but even every tear that they drop. I thank You for their prayers even on our behalf, and we pray that our prayers would be joined together with theirs as we go forward.

We just want to lay hands on you and say, â€œPress on, press on. God is satisfied, and He hears your cry, and He sees your tears. He knows your hearts, and we just bless you in the Name of Jesus! Continue to hear the Lord and go on, seek Him. You will find Him, walk with Him, and rejoice with Him.â€•

Lord, right now, we ask for a wave of cleansing, a wave of healing to come, so that all the pain, all the spiritual abuse that has taken place in the past, and any wounds will be redeemed, and even those very wounds will become valuable and precious. They will become the foundation for a fruitful ministry. Lord, we declare that the pain is gone, but the value remains. This is how precious jewels are formed, through pressure and testing, and we receive it from Your hands. If there is any blame or accusation left within us tonight, even now, we declare that we forgive, and we love and accept all Your people. We affirm one another by the spirit. Pressing on into discernment, I pray discernment in a deep, deep way. Discernment, blended with love and mercy, each one of you shall come forth as gold!

Thank-you Jesus. Amen

Although living in another country, these have joined many others, both at home and abroad, who affectionately call us Momma and Papa. Often, the re-connection begins when we confess and repent on behalf of the ineptness of our generation. We pray that the following words trigger intergenerational healing and help to spawn many spiritual family connections.

The Dilemma

Recently, at a baby dedication, I told the parents, â€œThis child is an arrow. By writing on the life of this child, you can send a message to those who live beyond your life time. He is your connection to the future. At the same time, you are his connection to the past. Impart into him the heritage and the wisdom that only years

can generate. It is only through a generational connection that we can benefit from the past and extend our life and hopes into the future.â€•

I might have added, â€œIf the relationship between the parents and child is severed, then the heritage will be lost to the child, and the future legacy will be lost to the parents. This will impede progress and doom each generation to repeat the failures and simply relive the past.â€•

The â€œXâ€• generation, born from 1960 to 1980, has been referred to as the fatherless generation. Not only were many of them brought up in homes without fathers, but also, many of the male adults in their lives knew little about true fathering. Besides being fatherless, they have, although perhaps unconsciously, adopted an independent spirit. This independence, based largely on mistrust of older persons, coupled with their own lack of experience and wisdom leaves them vulnerable to deception and poorly equipped to face the future. The generations have become largely separated and disconnected, and communication is limited. Because this is such a strong tendency in these last times, the final chapter of the Old Testament concludes with, â€œAnd he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curseâ€• (Malachi 4:6).

In a real sense, an orphan has no identity, no birthright, no bloodline, no inheritance, and no intimacy with the father. For an orphan, it is only me, myself, and I. They are the beginning of a detached entity and are self confined unless they find spiritual parents who will bestow their legacy upon them. This void and the sense of aloneness can only be filled with a father child relationship.

This dilemma is a significant factor in the present life of the Church. Since this fatherless-ness and lack of generational blessing is so pervasive, many are not even aware of its limiting and even damaging effect on the body of Christ. In the meantime, restoration of this lost relationship is beginning to manifest itself in the church. The results are much joy, increased anointing, and a new assurance of hope and blessing for the future. Many, who have entered into a new dimension of generational blessing, have urged us to write a booklet in order to bring hope and renewal to many others. We have been overwhelmed at home and across the world with an almost instantaneous response whenever we extend a fatherâ€™s love to young believers.

An interesting insight into the value of generational protection is seen in how a nursing infant can gain immunity through the motherâ€™s breast milk. If the infant does not get breast milk it must develop immunity on its own. Breast milk, containing some of the immune factors from the mother can purchase the child time and give it an advantage. In the same way, by accepting the experience of the parents, children can be spared from having to learn all of the negative pitfalls.

When I established a nutritional supplement company I found the governmental regulations and other complications overwhelming, and progress was very slow. Eventually, I secured the services of a retired government health inspector, to work part time as a consultant. His knowledge and experience was invaluable and saved me many hours. In fact, his help probably advanced our progress by years. In a real sense, he became a father to me and allowed me to gain the value of the preceding generation. At the same time, he no longer had the zeal and the energy and could not have carried the load of the company himself.

The Conspiracy

Many believers sense an increasing assurance of the Lordâ€™s imminent return. It seems that, with this same realization, the enemy has read the end of the Old Testament and discovered that a final requirement for the last days entails reconnecting the hearts. Parents must find restoration with the hearts of their children (Malachi 4:6).

This is no doubt why, in the past several generations, there has been a multi-faceted onslaught on the generational connections, especially father son relationships. Already, in the sixties when our children were born, I, as a father, was not allowed to be present at the hour of their delivery. At that time, I took that for granted. Only lately, I have come to realize that I had been robbed of that deep initial connection with my children. Upon that realization, I needed to grieve having been robbed of the God ordained opportunity to receive and bless my children upon the taking of their first breath.

Also, this forced separation at that critical moment of birth isolated the mothers ensuring that the father and mother would never be co-heirs of that sacred moment forever. This may well have contributed to the alienation and separation of husbands and wives. The dramatic rise of divorce in the ensuing generation contributed immensely to the state of fatherless-ness. This condition opens a way for the orphan spirit and a sense of independence, requiring the next generation to assume that fathers, especially, are unnecessary and often not to be trusted. This, along with the feminist emphasis which communicated that men and women, being equal, removes the need for both a father and a mother.

When we add to this the great plague of abortion, the picture gets clearer. Abortion sends the message to the new generation that they are an inconvenience and are quite dispensable. Unconsciously, the surviving children take on a spirit of mistrust and isolation. They are determined to survive, be self sufficient, and are fearful of imposing themselves on their seniors.

A further assault on fatherhood can be perceived in the deterioration of marriage and the concerted effort to force acceptance and approval of homosexuality. It certainly becomes evident that there has been a

concentrated conspiracy to destroy fatherhood and to force the Lord's hand to strike the earth with a curse. The good news is that there is still an innate cry and longing in the human heart for fathers as the following story portrays.

I Must Find My Father

The following actually took place a few years ago and was related to me by a close friend:

The friend, who I will call John Jones, went to pick up photos. They were kept under the name J. Jones. The attendant, a young woman, looked at him with eager eyes and asked, "Are you James Jones?"

"No," he replied, "I'm John Jones, why do you ask?"

"Sorry, I have no time to answer that now," she replied sadly.

He sensed an ache in her heart and asked if she wanted to talk during her lunch time. She agreed and told the following story:

When my mother was in college, she went to a rather wild party. Some time later she realized she was pregnant and I was the result. She never knew the man who was with her, but recalled his name as James Jones, but never saw him again. As I grew up, I missed having a father. But, even more now as an adult, I am feeling such a void in my being that I feel compelled to find and get to know my father. I have determined that I must find him so as to discover who I am and bring some continuity to my life. Do I have a history, or am I just an unattached entity in time? It is part of learning who I am and why I act the way I do. My husband realizes my need, and we are now working on the project together. We live in one state for six months and try every way possible to find my father. If we are unsuccessful, then we move on to the next state. We are about to move to another state because we have exhausted every avenue available and have not been able to find him. By the way, do you know anyone named James Jones?

She sighed with tears flowing from her weary empty eyes.

The story dramatically illustrates the void left in the heart when there is no father in the life of a human being.

The Generational Connection

It is God's design that there should be a generational connection. This is God's plan for progression and continuity. The generational connection is seen in Matthew where the lineage of Jesus is traced all the way to Abraham. Luke follows the generational connection, to Adam.

The Biblical records continuously refer to the generational connections. God is often referred to as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Rarely does God initiate and complete a matter in one generation. The concept is that one generation begins a project or journey and the next one continues or brings that project to a conclusion. As in the case of the building of the temple, the call and mandate was first put into the heart of David. The preparation of the ground and the gathering of the materials were carried out under by David. The next generation, Solomon, completed the project based on the work of the earlier generations. If this continuity is broken, then each one must attempt to begin and complete a project. But, life is too short, so projects are never completed, or each separate generation spends most of its life time repeating what the earlier had already done resulting in little progress.

Biblical spiritual father/son pairs are exemplified in Joshua and Moses, Elisha and Elijah, Ruth and Naomi, and Timothy and Paul. Each one continued the work of their spiritual father, building on and yet furthering the fulfillment of the call.

The Generational Disconnect

In my agricultural heritage, my great grandfather cleared land and built a basic shelter and acquired some livestock. My grandfather added to this homestead, enlarging and developing it. This allowed him to develop it much further than if he had begun independently.

Although my grandfather was a good farmer, he was quite persistent in maintaining his established ways of doing things. My father had different ideas, and so they parted ways. After many years, my father, who in a sense started again, got to the place where my grandfather had left off, having redone most of what he might have inherited.

How often have we noted that the people of God's last move end up rejecting and persecuting the next move? This is no doubt why each move does not last and why very little spiritual progress is made. Vision and zeal belongs to the young, wisdom and authority to the older generation. When we cannot respect and honor each other's roles, we lose our blessings and, in fact, enter into what Malachi 4: 6 refers to as a curse and the new move gets aborted. One aspect of the curse is to do something over and over without any progress.

In the 60s, many radical young people came to the Lord in an awakening which was referred to as "The Jesus People." There was the potential for a great harvest, but it eventually dissipated, probably because of a lack of fathers. They needed fathers who could see their hearts and embrace these long haired, barefoot,

radicals who wanted only Jesus. There was a great lack of fathers who could allow them space to grow and mature in the way Jesus allowed the "sons of thunder" to mature. These new believers loved Jesus and wanted to follow Him at any cost. At the same time, they lacked the experience and wisdom necessary to avoid the pitfalls and deceptions of the enemy. Almost inevitably, they got tangled up in their own inexperience, became divided, and lost their momentum.

This story has been repeated many times, even since the Reformation. The new generation enters into an exciting new relationship with the Lord and is filled with zeal and new vision. The older generation digs in to hold and protect their position and cherished traditions. Seeing no other recourse, the younger generation breaks away in pursuit of their own vision. Initially, the freedom and new found joy is seen as evidence of the Lord being with them. However, having lost the generational connection with their spiritual fathers, they are soon floundering in a sea of inexperience unable to detect submerged logs and detours which only fathers could detect. Meanwhile, the fathers left in the home church, lose their hope and have foregone a vibrant connection with the future.

My father had a dramatic spiritual encounter in 1950. He was totally misunderstood, forced to spend time in a mental hospital, and became alienated from the church and any spiritual fathers. During the next decades, he sought and found occasional fellowship with somewhat like minded spiritual orphans. In all of his remaining years, he was never able to regain trust in the established church, or find a spiritual father he could trust and was forced to work things out on his own. While he seemed to make little progress and traveled many disappointing detours, he did learn many valuable spiritual lessons.

In 1971, my wife and I and a group of other young people experienced a powerful spiritual visitation which was not understood by our church. I sensed immediately that this may be what Dad experienced years earlier. Dad joined us, and we had some wonderful times together. I had finally reconnected with my father. During this time, we were visited by people who were a part of an exciting new fringe group spiritual movement who received us with open arms. My dad sensed something amiss and reacted negatively. He cautioned me and warned me that this involvement would lead us into a detour. Since my dad's history seemed unstable to me, and since we were overjoyed with this new acceptance; we threw our life and future into this movement. Our time there was a profitable part of our journey, but after some years, I came to realize that my dad had seen something which we had not been able to see. At that time, we had to make a difficult exit out of that movement. Had we been open to his counsel, we might have been spared some time in our journey. If we had had a wholesome and healthy father son relationship we might have both enjoyed a significantly enriched journey.

Limiting Concepts of Fathering

When we speak to young people about the need for spiritual fathers, many times they become somewhat apprehensive. While some of this may be due to their own independence, often their concerns are based on past experiences. Unfortunately, fathers, even when present, were often functioning in a negative and misguided way. Many parents had no idea how to father, and some, even with all good intentions, were simply repeating the ways of their parents. Others, in reaction to the ways of their parents, fell into an opposite extreme. This may have been adequate when change was not yet the order of the day. But these ways are no longer able to accommodate the fast pace of our present times, so children feel they have no alternative but to break away and find their own way.

A common practice in the church where I grew up was that the earlier generation insisted that the next generation simply learn and repeat the same course that they had taken. The older generation trained and programmed the next generation to learn to do and think as they have. Only when the new generation proved themselves and conformed to all of the accepted forms and procedures would they be given leadership responsibility. The result was that the next generation was forced to simply repeat what the earlier one had done. This repetition of history may be a significant reason why the church has made little progress toward the goal. If this had been the concept in business and industry, we would still be driving horses and writing with quills. Of course, there are certain truths and principles that remain the same. However, the methods and applications must adjust to the times in which we find ourselves.

Only if we, the older generation, have truly reached the highest goal possible in kingdom life, do we have a right to expect our children to simply repeat our work. Otherwise, we must be willing to release them and allow them to venture beyond our experiences. Since we have not brought in the final harvest nor seen the Lord's return, we must release the next generation to run faster and further than we have.

Another limiting concept arises with fathers who find themselves unable to realize their own dreams and now expect their children to be the instruments to fulfill them. Dad wanted to be a doctor, but couldn't afford medical school. He now expects his son to be a doctor. This has its merit, but is effective only if this is actually the child's dream, and he is allowed to enhance and further the dream.

We must believe that each child, chosen by the Lord, has planted deep in his heart a call and a vision. As fathers, we must help them realize this call, fan that gift into flame, and help to encourage and guide them. It is not our place to extinguish that flame and replace it with ours, but to protect it and coach it so that as a

â€œcontrolled burnâ€ it may realize its fullest potential.

Many fathers seem to know how to relate to and father children but not sons. A fatherâ€™s role with children is to be protector, instructor, provider, and leader. The father seeks the Lord and fulfills his mandate by instructing the children and carrying through the Lordâ€™s directives.

The problem arises when the children mature and require a different level of relationship which we refer to as sonship. At this point the sons, have gained a level of maturity and perception and are able to discern and understand matters, and at times even see through some of the inconsistency of the older generation. By this time the sons need to feel involved and able to dialogue and contribute and feel they are being heard. If the fathers are not able to appreciate this need and continue to relate to them as children, the sons begin to feel controlled.

If the communication is weak, frustration may build up, and eventually a strong reaction may be perceived as rebellion. If this cannot be resolved the sons will begin to find others they can relate to, often in their own generation and begin their own â€œwork,â€ and we have another generational divide. It is said of some fathers; â€œThey have many children, but no sons.â€ When the children reach sonship they simply leave.

When this tension rises, a common reaction of the father is, â€œO-K, I release you, be free to do what you feel the Lord wants you to do.â€ Much to his surprise the sons are not satisfied with this â€œrelease.â€ What the sons really want is best described as â€œpartnership.â€ They donâ€™t want to leave and do their own thing, they want to see their views and vision appreciated and considered and at times incorporated into the decision making process. If we fathers can allow sincere input, even some which might expose our own blind spots, our relationship with sons will be deepened and enriched.

Most of the new zeal, new vision, fresh revelations, and breakthroughs in church history have come to the body through younger people. It was at these times that most of the divisions have resulted because the older generation has not been able to accommodate and walk with the new generation allowing their revelation to be incorporated into the church life in a mature way. The time has come to break this cycle of generational dividing. May we exercise grace to allow our children to enter into sonship and keep the generational connection?

Models of Fathering

Rather than concentrating on negative qualities, letâ€™s focus on positive fathering qualities. Consider the Chinese immigrant parents who move to Canada. They run a small corner store for sixteen hours a day, seven days a week. What is their dream for their son? Are they determined that the son will run the same store in the same way for the rest of his life as well? No, their anticipation is that their son will be able to get an education and advance far beyond his father. The father will live on the minimum, lying aside as much as possible in order to see the son advance according to his potential. The fatherâ€™s satisfaction lies in seeing his son go faster and further than he did!

Many Canadians have met or heard of an aged brother, Robert Birch, affectionately referred to as Pastor Bob. When he was eighty years of age, he invited a young man named David to join him in his travels. David had had a very successful ministry as a young man in Egypt, but the Lord had advised him to drop it until he had the covering of a spiritual father. Pastor Bob recognized that this young man had a special anointing but was unknown and relatively inexperienced. So, he introduced him wherever he went and, often, after giving a short message, he asked David to minister while Pastor Bob would pray for him. With Pastor Bobâ€™s prayer support and his making a place for him, Davidâ€™s ministry advanced rapidly. David, knowing the need and value of a father honored pastor Bob and learned much from him. Today David Demian is leading the international ministry known as Watchmen for the Nations which pastor Bob began.

During the first ten years, David traveled across Canada calling forth spiritual fathers. By now, there are several hundred who have recognized this calling and have covenanted to rise up and be fathers to spiritual sons. In the recent years, the call has gone out to Gen X declaring that now there are fathers in place who will allow the younger generation to soar and fly. This generation will be loved and protected and released to run faster and further than their parents did. This call has been heard by thousands who are now rising up in every province.

Many tears of repentance and reconciliation have washed away the generational walls of separation; walls made up of controlling expectations as well as fear, mistrust and suspicion. As these walls are removed the youth are soaring to meet their calling with joy and confidence. Many are already beginning to be fathers to the younger generation, sometimes referred to as the Millennials. Older men and women, who once felt alienated and defensive toward the radical zeal of the young, have a new trust in and hope for the next generation. Many younger people; who felt misunderstood, mistrusted, and intimidated by older leaders; are now able to share their visions and feel needed and released in the body.

Many Christians are familiar with the singer and musician Michael W. Smith. Not many are aware that he attributes much of his success to his spiritual father Don Finto. Michael tells how Don believed in him and encouraged him before he ever cut one recording. He saw more in me than even I did. He laughed and cried and prayed with me, and I still have his letters and notes of encouragement says Smith. No doubt, the music

and songs of Smith are different than those Finto sang as a youth, but he allowed Smith to go beyond what he himself did.

The influence of fathers is often unknown, but many times it becomes the strength and foundation for the next generation. Most people are aware of the wisdom of King Solomon, and how he had made a special request to God for wisdom. It is not so well known why he asked for wisdom. In Proverbs 4:5, Solomon tells us that his father David had taught him as a boy, "Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth." In verse 7, he recounts his father's words, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom."

I was an early starter. Assuming I could make it on my own, I became quite self sufficient. I left home at fifteen to work my way through a private high school. I taught a one room eight grade country school at age seventeen. By age twenty, Janet and I were married while in college. While I had my own father and a special encouraging uncle, one "father" stands out in my life.

During college, John Steiner, a local pastor and principal of a Christian school, took me under his wing even though he had many other things to do. He encouraged me to attend Seminary and gave me a part-time position at his school to make it possible. He accepted me as his student pastor and let me preach, although I had far more zeal than substance. He was more conservative than I, but he saw my heart and allowed me to explore liberalism. Now, I am probably more conservative than he was. He ordained me at age twenty-six, even though qualified only in name. His trust in me tamed my independent spirit and mellowed my self-confidence even while I was unaware.

During the following years, though many miles apart, I always anticipated the days I could spend with him. His influence on my life was profound. When John was elderly and weak, the Lord allowed me to be in his hometown and visit his bedside. I was able to express my deep appreciation for his role in my life. We embraced; he blessed me and passed away several days later. While I didn't know the term "spiritual father" in those days, he truly was one.

A High Calling

To be a father involves "what we are" more than "what we do." What you do as a true father involves what you do for others rather than for yourself. The term "mentor" is often used. I believe this carries something of the meaning, but conveys less intimacy than when speaking of a relationship with a father. "Coach" is also a good term. Especially in that the coach's heart is to see and develop the very best potential in the player. Above all, a coach wants to see the player flourishing even if he does not always win. Yet, I believe that the role of a father is even deeper.

A true spiritual father will sacrifice to see his child reach their God given potential and is happy if he goes far beyond the father's ability. What he does is not for his own purposes but to see the children happy and successful. We have been blessed with four wonderful children, three of them girls. After decades of love and care for my daughters, the day came when I walked them down the aisle and gave them away to make another man happy. Yet, my happiness is completed by seeing them happy and fulfilled, not to fulfill my dreams but their own. This is the role of a father!

A true father must tune his heart with the patience and heart of Jesus. Jesus accepted and "fathered" an impetuous and blundering Peter, and a James and John, the two "sons of thunder." He didn't condemn or abandon them even in their times of failure. This allowed them to be secure in His love. John was so secure in that love that he referred to himself as the "disciple who Jesus loved." When we read the epistles of Peter and John, we see the transforming effect of that patient and enduring fatherly love.

A mature father knows himself, his own strength and weakness, his role and calling, and is secure in the Father's love. This eliminates insecure striving, jealousy, competition and defensiveness. Only from this position of personal security can we live in and demonstrate the Heavenly Father's love. From this attitude, we are able to permit and even rejoice when our "sons" excel and even surpass us. We are more interested in making room for their gifts and function, then to promote or exercise ours.

We must first receive and accept the unconditional love from our heavenly Father, who receives the prodigals and whose mercy endures forever. Then, we need to exercise expressing that love clearly and openly. The Father realized that even Jesus needed to hear the Father's love expressed openly as He did at Jesus' baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration. Every person needs to feel that they matter and are needed. This is the first step in opening a son's heart toward a father.

When I made mistakes as a child, I was told about it. When I did well, nothing was said, but I was able to deduct that I was doing o-k. With this background, I found it hard to realize that children need to be approved and can be greatly strengthened and encouraged by being commended. I have had to deliberately learn to affirm and compliment young people. This also requires that we notice their efforts and maintain relational involvements, not just show up when adjustment is required.

To project our Father, we must learn the difference between punishment and discipline. The Father may discipline, but He does not punish. There is a big difference. Punishment expresses judgment and results in condemnation, producing a sense of failure and discouragement. Discipline enlightens, relates actions to

consequences, and activates improvement and thereby, brings in hope and encouragement. God's discipline is entirely intended to bring us into a fuller realization of His purposes and bring us into His likeness. Many youth are already battling a sense of failure and hopelessness. We must find ways to perfect them through positive re-enforcement and constructive encouragement.

Above all, fathers need to be available and this requires "real" time. Not just superficial amounts of time, but undistracted focused time. Times when the newspaper is laid down, the TV is off, and the focus is on the child and his interests. This gives a sense of significance. Many children have little assurance that they matter more than the TV. At times, this means being available when it is not convenient. This may involve lending a hand, taking time out for coffee, perhaps a round of golf, or some activity where the focus is totally one on one.

When our son was five years old, he came and stood beside me when I was visiting with a church leader in our home. After a few moments, I excused myself and asked the boy what he needed. He briefly made his request and left the room. The guest was obviously somewhat annoyed at what he saw as an interruption. I commented, "I figure if I don't have time for him at age five, then he might not have time for me at age fifteen." Today I am blessed to see my son serve as a pastor and almost forty years later we still enjoy working and fellowshiping together.

Fathers are called to bestow blessing and provide impartation. This goes beyond being a teacher. A teacher can share knowledge and information and then leave the scene. To be a father requires a deep ongoing relationship and a commitment of self sacrifice. This is why Paul reminded the Corinthians that they may have a thousand teachers but few fathers (1 Corinthians 4:15). Furthermore, if the father knows and is walking with the Lord in a deep way, he will receive the words for himself and his sons. The essence and fragrance of Christ will radiate from him and affect the sons through impartation beyond words and beyond teaching.

Fathering must be a mutually agreed upon relationship. It may involve one's own natural son, one's spiritual son, or an adopted spiritual son. Paul referred to Onesimus, who was converted through Paul, as his son. Thus he would be a spiritual son. He also referred to Timothy, who was converted earlier, as his son. Timothy might be considered a son by adoption. The relationship must voluntarily involve accountability and transparency, as well as, mutual confidence. The price is high, but the rewards are eternal. Age is not the significant factor. A spiritual father may be chronologically younger than the son, but simply older in spiritual experience.

We must be aware that insecurity and feelings of rejection are common among the younger generation. To overcome this requires much love and affirmation. It is important to find loving and kind ways to offer suggestions instead of making demands or even giving instructions. Once the defenses are raised, trust is easily lost and the relationship suffers a set back. A suggestion of "consider this" is easier to handle than a "that will never work" reprimand.

Finally, fathers must be willing to release the next generation. Give them opportunity to function even if we could do it better. Let them try new ways and methods. Some may succeed, others may fail. We will stand by and help in the learning experience. In our time, degrees and titles were often required qualifications. In Jesus' times, commitment and a willing heart were the requirements. Jesus, after demonstrating ministry, sent His disciples out, even before they were perfected. May we begin to recognize hearts, gifting and anointing as more important than perfection or academic qualification.

Spiritual Mothers

While the general principles of spiritual fathers may apply to both men and women, it is helpful to see that there are particular and unique differences. In the same way that a man cannot fully meet a child's need for a mother, neither can a woman fully meet the need for a father.

When I was about to set aside several days to write this booklet, I asked a senior father to pray for me. In his prayer, he prayed, "Father, I ask that you bring clarity on the difference between spiritual fathers and mothers. Feminism has depreciated the role of fathers and has presumed that the role of men and women are interchangeable. Grant a clear word to express the uniqueness of and the absolute necessity for both spiritual fathers and mothers."

Teenage girls, young mothers, and even mothers of teens are crying out for spiritual mothers. Many young men feel unloved and uncared for because they are aching in their hearts for a mother's love and care. Women are created to need and provide intimacy, warmth, care, and emotional support. They are often more able to sense the hurts and discouragement of others. Overall, however, we recommend that women work with women and men with men.

Even men need spiritual mothers. I lost my birth mother at the age of two, but was deeply blessed by a godly step-mother who was an amazing spiritual mother. Since I found it difficult to please my father, I could easily have become discouraged. Many times she encouraged me and built up my self confidence, but never criticizing or depreciating my father. Her love for the Lord, her great patience, and words of grace inspired me and empowered my heart to withstand the temptations of youth. Even as she grew old, at times when I visited her, I would leave her presence with a new zeal to love the Lord like Mom did.

She taught me how to deal quickly with offense, how to never blame others, and endure hardship without

murmuring. I only learned of some of the hardships she endured years after they had occurred. She gave of herself unselfishly. She loved and accepted my wife as her own child from the day she first saw her. She was the model of impartiality. When my widowed father, who was left with three small boys, asked for her hand in marriage, she asked the Lord not to give her a son, lest she would be partial to her own son. The Lord granted her request by giving me five beautiful step sisters.

Paul knew the need for and the powerful value of godly mothers and set forth a mold for such ones in Titus 2: 3-5:

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

Spiritual mothering, just as natural mothering, requires much time and patience. It can not simply be done in a class or an occasional lecture. Very little real mothering can be done in a group. Most of it is done one-on-one as need arises and in every day settings. But, the reward is great, especially when ones children become mothers and new spiritual generations come forth.

In the seventies, we were involved in a fellowship with a dramatic outreach and saw many new believers. During this time, besides our four children, we always had at least two or more young new believers living in our home. Some of these had never known a wholesome home life. What they caught was far more important than what they were taught. Today many of these are parents, grandparents, and spiritual mothers to several generations.

To be a spiritual mother or father requires selfless love and a greater concern for others than for themselves. This requires a strong relationship with the Lord and a deep revelation of His unwavering and unconditional love for us.

Practical Steps

Periodically throughout history there seems to be times when the Spirit of God moves in, and revival or renewal breaks out. This usually breaks forth among the young who are spiritually hungry and seeking. I have heard much about 1948 religious trend referred to as the "Latter Rain Movement." I was personally affected during a time of renewal in the late 60s and early 70s. Many prophetic leaders believe strongly that we are at the beginning of another major revival and unprecedented harvest.

The wonder is that there are such awesome times, but the sad part is that they rarely last. Having pondered and studied this quandary, I have come to the conclusion that the disconnect of the generations is the primary problem. When some of us experienced a dramatic renewal in 1971, we were immediately misunderstood and ostracized. We could find no one who understood our experience, not even one spiritual father to share with or receive counsel from. We felt forced to leave the pastorate and the denomination of which we were a part. We were attracted by a fringe group and traveled though many detours and blind alleys.

Thirty years later I was invited back to the church we had left for a time of repentance and reconciliation. While there I asked the Lord if the Spirit could now break forth in that place. I felt it was, not yet possible because there were still not enough fathers or mentors who could care for the young, and it would, again, end up in division.

I have traveled extensively on several continents and I am now assured that many true fathers are being prepared. This time the generational connection will hold, and the impending revival can be contained and maintained while the harvest is completed.

We have seen that the fathers must be willing to acknowledge past failures and have their hearts broadened to make room for sons to advance. This has required much dealing and death to the self and a deeper trust in the Lord's sovereign hand. At the same time, the sons must come to recognize and repent of the attitudes of independence, self sufficiency, and presumption common to the "X" generation.

One way that the spirit of independence and self sufficiency is broken is by asking God for a teachable heart. This is indispensable for a healthy father/son relationship. This requires, first of all, a dropping of the "I know it all" attitude. No matter how long we live, there is always more to be learned, and there are always other perspectives to be considered. Furthermore, we must ask for deliverance from fear of rejection and defensiveness. Just because a father offers another view does not mean we are wrong or being rejected. In a healthy relationship, we should be able to objectively consider matters even if we have a differing view. When we disagree we can always say, "Please give me some time to consider the matter," rather than react with frustration and allow alienation to set into the relationship.

To be a father does not require perfection. We must put aside expectations and subjective insecurities. Reach for each other's heart and bless and encourage one another with the Lord's love. We must learn to honor our fathers and avoid uncovering their weaknesses or failures as Ham did to His father Noah in Genesis 9:22. The blessing is for those who cover the weaknesses and failures of their parent. We not only do

not look at their weaknesses, but even cover for them so others do not see them.

Fathers also need love and encouragement. Have you thanked your father for passing on the faith, for standing firm through the years, for paving the way so you can now run whereas he had to walk? I told a younger brother, who I recognized as very mature for his age, that I was sorry that I had been so slow. What took me forty years to learn and experience, he seems to have attained in ten. "Oh no," he replied, "You had to battle and thrash through the bushes to prepare a way. Now we younger ones can stand on your shoulders. We can run where you had to crawl. Thank-you, so much!" I was surprised, blessed, brought out of condemnation, and encouraged.

I am also encouraged in how recently many in the younger generation are researching to find where the Spirit moved powerfully in the past. There is much to be learned from this. We may see how and why the fire was lost. Sometimes, instead of digging a new well, it is faster to refurbish the wells of our fathers. Let there be no competition or comparison as to who did what better. Let us covenant together to realize God's full desire at any cost.

Here, we would also note the great value that can be realized in being subject to a difficult father or leader. This is demonstrated most clearly in the situation of David and Saul. David had many valid reasons to react and throw off the weight of Saul's oppressive hand. David's recognition of and respect for God's order paid great dividends in his later life.

Many, who react to being under a heavy hand and find a way to escape, often find this phenomenon repeated when their own sons also walk away from them. Many who honored even the most severe leaders and fathers secured God's honor and a recompense of great blessing in their future situations. Furthermore, often the scars of earlier wounds and even abuse can be redeemed and add the weight of experience and increased transformation. What has happened to us is often less important than how we handle it and the attitude we hold toward those involved.

Much is said these days about "being covered." It is true that we all can benefit from having a spiritual covering, and this is part of the function of spiritual fathers. However, this does not obligate a father to approve and support whatever a son feels led to do. On the other hand, it does not mean that a son can only do what they tell him to do. If my son and I share in prayer and consideration of a matter, we may agree that it seems o-k to proceed with the matter. This joint decision implies that I will share responsibility both in the outworking and its outcome and consequences. A different situation exists, if he comes to me and says, I have prayed and received several confirmations and I am going to do this, will you cover me? I can pray for and bless him, but he cannot use my name on it, nor do I bear responsibility for its outcome because the matter was not based on our relationship. I may bear with and even assist, but in the deeper sense, my responsibility to cover is limited. We must all learn the difference between individual and corporate decisions.

Making Room for Little Ones

I have been told that in the time of the Huguenots that even children still in cribs were prophesying. We are beginning to witness a remarkable surge in the spiritual action among young children. As parents and grandparents, we need to prepare to shepherd these little ones. In earlier days, we would have simply ignored children talking about dreams and pictures from the Lord as imagination.

This area has become very real to us since we have a grandson who has spiritual dreams and often sees prophetic pictures. He spends extended periods of time praying in the spirit and loves to worship. Observing his development and having seen a number of his generation being raised with varying results, I submit the following suggestions:

Encourage children to hear from the Lord and appreciate their response relative to their level of maturity. At the same time, do not push them or exaggerate their spiritual capacity. Since children are eager to please, they may readily perform according to expectations. This can easily cause them to behave and act beyond their inward reality and set the stage for a pharisaical performance. I have also seen children who were pressured to behave spiritually like others. While they may do this to please the parents, eventually they react and rebel. True spirituality, even in a child, emanates from a willing heart.

At the same time, we must make room for the children. A number of times when I have been asked to pray for someone, much to their surprise, I have asked my seven year old grandson to join me. They have been even more surprised when he has a significant prophetic word for them. In one such case, an intercessor and business woman was about to leave for a business trip and asked for prayer. The seven year old said, "I see you with a big antenna on your head and other people around you with smaller antennas. Some were just getting antennas while you spoke. I think this means that you will receive messages from God and when you speak, others will hear God through you. The ones getting the antennas while you speak are being born again and then they will also be able to hear from God."

On some occasions when asked, his response is simply, "I don't have anything." This is also acceptable and more evidence of authenticity than if he always comes up with something.

It should be noted that children who are exceptionally spiritually sensitive are often more prone to nightmares, frightful dreams, and irrational fears. Sensitivity to the spirit world can also make one more

susceptible to pick up negative or evil spirits and spiritual attacks, and so they require much prayer cover. Learning and reciting scripture, as well as, singing worship songs are far more effective to help to get through these attacks than reasoning or scolding. I never learned to “hear words” or pray prophetically until in my fifties. My daughter learned in her thirties, and now my grandson does before age ten. This is what I call generational acceleration. Get ready!!

Here is a great opportunity for grandparents to nurture the Spiritual growth of our grandchildren. A grandparent is an awesome being in the mind of a young child. To be noticed, loved, and commended by a grandparent is very powerful. When my grandchildren arrive in the driveway, I try to come out of the house to meet them. I love to take time to play with and to talk to them. This develops a relationship that gives me the ground to impart life, and truth, and wisdom, and encouragement that will affect them for their whole lifetime.

A Son's Journey

My relationship with my natural father was a complex but powerful learning journey. His strength, which often also became his weakness, was that he did not care what others thought. This often set him at odds with teachers, parents, siblings, and his own children. He had a different way to do almost anything. On the farm, the way we ploughed or harvested was noticeably different much to my embarrassment. Dad thought I was far too concerned about, “What will people think?”

I determined to become educated, even if I had to pay my own way, and went on my own at an early age. I worked my way through college and Seminary. During this time, dad had the spiritual encounter mentioned earlier. From that experience, he concluded that doctrine and knowledge were all in the mind and only the Spirit was reality. This thinking led him into some strange and controversial concepts. Even when I became a pastor, he never came to hear me preach. He never attended church and debated with any pastor who tried to persuade him to do so. So, although we related in a general way, we could never relate spiritually.

At about age forty, I was praying about my relationship with dad when I felt the Lord saying that my attempts to correct my father were contrary to His order and His blessing was not on it. My place was to honor my father and allow the Lord to correct him. I determined not to voice my opinion even if I disagreed with Dad's comments, and our relationship improved remarkably.

About a year later, the Lord said to me, “You are doing well on the outside, but deep inside your heart, you are still judging and correcting your Dad's thinking.” I knew this word was true, but I pleaded with the Lord to do a deep inner work in me. Suddenly, He gave me a revelation. I have a close friend who is handicapped and partially paralyzed. Suppose every time I saw him I would judge him and demand that he stand erect and function properly. This demand would be cruel and impossible to meet. Then, the Lord showed me that Dad had numerous wounds which inflicted certain handicaps on him, and I was placing demands and expectations that he could not possibly meet.

I was overwhelmed and repented to the Lord. I apologized to my dad for my judgments and demands. When I was able to allow him to be who he was, a new deep love sprang up in my heart for him. I wanted to be with him and I loved to hear him talk. To my surprise, he suddenly became much more interested in my thoughts. We grew much closer in the following years. Prior to his death, he became much closer to the Lord. He asked me to speak at his memorial service and granted me a sweet blessing several days before he passed away.

I share this because our walk with our own father is not always easy, but I trust it may give some insight in such cases. Perhaps, in a way, even though he was my natural father, maybe I became his spiritual father. Maybe when we take the more mature position than one older than us, perhaps even our parents, to that extent we become the father.

The Need for Family

Behind the generational disconnect, the depreciation of and even the destruction of the family is very much involved. Recently, I heard a political “expert” warn against agencies like, “Focus on the Family.” Then, I had to consider, why would an emphasis on the family be such a threat? I began to realize that family involves commitment, it involves accountability for one's actions, and it involves living for others as much as for one's self. Being in a family places me within boundaries from which there is no easy escape and limits and restricts my personal liberties. At the same time, these very limitations are essential for maturity and transformation to take place. This is the price for true joy, purpose, meaning, and a deep sense of belonging. Our present culture has believed that we can have the benefits without the price. We must be careful that we do not make that same assumption.

In the natural realm, we have an immediate family, an extended family, and we are part of a people group, or nation. In the spiritual realm, to be healthy, we also need these three levels of family. The church, where we meet and fellowship might be considered our extended family. The church at large, or body of Christ, is our people or spiritual nation. It is, however, most important that we have an immediate family. To realize this, we all should be part of a home group, cell group, or small group. Only in this setting can the real dynamics of family be realized. Within this setting, there should be spiritual fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, involving relationships, all with a sense of responsibility and accountability.

Generational Uniqueness

Recently I was attending the funeral of my ninety year old uncle. While there a picture of a bookshelf was given to me with each shelf representing a generation. As I considered the unique quality or characteristic of each generation I received the following impressions. My parents' generation being quite conservative seemed to be focused on knowing what is right. To please and honor God seemed to be related with doing what is right; how to act, how to dress, what is right or wrong was all important.

My generation, the next shelf, might be characterized by being educated, informed and psychologically sound. Science, theology, and in depth Biblical analysis seemed necessary to know and understand God's will and leading. For us education, title, past experience and training are considered to be necessary for positions of responsibility.

The next generation, sometime referred to as Gen X approaches matters in their own unique way. They seem to be more focused on knowing the Lord inwardly and experientially. They want to hear the Lord speaking, and sense His presence, especially in worship. To these their walk with the Lord and their gifting and anointing are more important qualifications than are diplomas or education. They tend to be much more aware of and sensitive to the spirit realm.

As I perceived the above qualities I felt led to thank God for those who have been faithful within their own generational perspective. I felt to honor the older generation but also developed a new respect for and a desire to understand and appreciate the upcoming generations.

Generational Language Barriers

Occasionally I hear young people say concerning their elders, "I feel they just don't understand me. They think they do, but they just don't." From this response I have had to conclude that the younger generation, actually speaks a different language. It's not just a matter of different vocabulary, like, cool, sweet, and rad. It's more like filtering things through a different lens. Perhaps even a matter of tuning in to a different spiritual frequency.

For example; recently I attended a conference where there was considerable tension between generations. Two young men who had been invited confirmed that they would attend the evening meeting. Somehow they did not show up which raised some questions to the older leaders. When they were contacted the young men said, that as they were driving to the meeting they both felt strongly that the Lord had asked them not to come to the meeting but to return to their homes.

Here we have one aspect of what I call the language problem. To the older ones, a commitment is a promise and it is irresponsible to renege on it. How can such ones be trusted? After all how could we have a conference if we all acted that way?

To the younger men, hearing and obeying what the Lord says is preeminent. Loyalty to what appears a system or program is secondary.

Another example of different languages: Suppose my generation wants to approach a politician concerning a moral issue. We would do our research, secure facts and figures, and be prepared to present a solid logical case. We would pray that the Lord would lead us and perhaps pray that the politician would be receptive and perhaps open to change his mind on the issue.

Recently the younger ones in our community decided to meet with a politician concerning their moral concerns. After prayer and some research they felt led to send two of them to talk while the rest prayed to discern and bind the possible spiritual forces that may be involved. The spokesmen approached the politician and found that although initially he was defensive, he soon became very caring. They attempted to speak to his heart and conscience and plead with him on behalf of their generation. This approach never occurred to us thirty years ago.

The youth are in the learning and experimental mode. The language of the heart and zeal often speaks louder than the accuracy of the word or the weight of the deed. To hear the Lord requires practice and even some degree of experimentation. We older ones, must see beyond the sometimes immature "hearings" and affirm the desire and passion to hear and know the Lord.

It has become recognized that the native, first nations, people tend to be more aware of and sensitive to the spiritual realm. While this characteristic is found in some older persons I believe it is beginning to manifest itself much more in the younger generations. I am finding many young people, who sense the moving of the spirit, receive prophetic pictures, and feel the Spirit's presence much more than I do. I was twenty to thirty years in the Lord before I could even say, "The Lord spoke to me," or "there is a strong anointing in this place."

Some Church Applications

Frequently intergenerational tension can be seen in the church. This can easily become serious and at

times results in a church split. I believe this is often the result of a very common misapplication of church order and structure. There is a parallel between church leaders and their congregation with spiritual fathers and sons. In the remaining pages we want to soberly consider some of these problems.

The Clergy Laity Divide

While there are designations such as pastor, teacher, etc, in the Body of Christ, let us be clear that they are in reference to a function and not position. While we may be referred to by those designations, and due respect is in order this dare not to be seen as a class above the other members of the body. In the New Testament all are priests and all are to grow into the head and have a personal and direct relationship with the Lord Himself. Jesus makes it clear in Matt. 20:26 that we do not "lord it over" others as they do in the world.

Due to civil requirements there may be some need for certain ones to be considered as clergy, but within the body we recognize one another by the spirit, by giftings and anointings and not by titles. Practically this means that one does not need to be "ordained" in order to preach, or in order to visit the sick. If all were released to function relative to their calling and gifting, a pastor would not always have to be there to be sure the church can function. It further means that a person does not have to be on the church payroll in order to teach, preach, visit or lead worship. A meeting could be started when saints begin to assemble and everyone does not need to sit and wait until "The Pastor" arrives to officially "open" the meeting.

In Rev. 2:6&15 we read of the Nicolaitans. The Greek suggest this refers to those who suppress the common people, i.e. laity, by the power of position or title. This violates the priesthood of all believers. It generates an atmosphere where members are assumed to accept the role of spectators, while those, "in the ministry" do the work. When titles and position are promoted this opens a door for a spirit of control to enter and especially the younger generation feels disinterested and intimidated.

The Hazard of Titles and Position

To introduce this matter let me recite a comment I heard recently. "Before Brother D. was ordained as a pastor it was easy to approach him and we could freely dialogue about matters. Now he seems distant and not able to accept feed-back and suddenly appears to feel he needs to have all the answers. I'm beginning to feel an obligation to not only honor him, but also to please him in order to maintain his respect."

It takes a humble heart and a conscious effort not to allow a position or title to influence us. There is a natural tendency to place ourselves above others and this can be accommodated by a leadership position. A leader who becomes unapproachable, to whom others could not easily share freely their sense or observations concerning his actions is in danger. We all, even the most capable leaders, are liable to self deception. Strong capable personalities holding titles can very easily loose the protection of honest feedback. This is the basic reason why great leaders have been able to mislead both themselves and entire movements. No one dared question them, and their, "body guards" who succumbed to their influence became part of the control machine.

When we are unapproachable we become unaware of the true feelings of others. Ot