

FATHERS THAT COUNT FOR ETERNITY

Matthew 4:18-23

When time has stopped, and life is over, and your fathering is called into accountability, will the example that you have lived out have made an eternal impact for God, or will your parenting be that of a parent who never took into consideration the things of God and the things that mattered for eternity- a life of faithful, loyal devotions to Christ. Father's that count for eternity:

1. ARE CHARACTERIZED WITH A GENUINE LOVE FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

While the Bible records very little about Zebedee, the father of James and John, there is much to learn through the ways that he responded to his sons. Zebedee was that type of father who didn't tell the boys what to do, but rather he was a "hands on dad". When you read the account of Jesus passing by, the Bible records that Zebedee was with the his boys "in the ship". Zebedee loved his sons and he loved spending time with his boys in the ship. The fact that they were together reveals that he and his sons had an intimate relationship with one another, so much so, that they found joy in his presence and he found joy in their presence. No where in this passage of Scripture do you find Zebedee blurting out commands to his sons, but rather the evidence of his actions is one of speaking to them in love. The fact that they were together on a regular basis speaks volumes of their relationship with one another. No doubt if their relationship would have been one of hostility and hatred, the sons could and would have found work elsewhere. But the fact that they spent time together reveals the truth of their father's love for them.

The dad that counts for eternity is that dad that develops a loving relationship with his children from the point of infancy into adulthood. No doubt James and John could not recall a time when "dad was not there".

Zebedee's love for his sons, he treated them as individuals, not barking out commands from a hostile spirit, but treating them as "men of integrity" and "individuals of worth".

Dads, when you speak, are your words characterized by love or do your bark out commands? If your children were asked how you view them- could they say in honesty that they are treated as "individuals of worth and integrity"? Much of the parental breakdown today has nothing to do with culture, the times, but rather an unwillingness to view children as individuals who are significant and important. When parents are not oriented to God properly, they cannot be effective parents from God's vantage point.

When a parent barks out commands, gives orders, and treats the children with harshness, there will be a lack of respect, and a lack of cooperation.

2. ARE CHARACTERIZED BY THEIR WILLINGNESS TO TEACH AND INSTILL A GENUINE WORK ETHIC.

Imagine for a moment what the world would be like if only 80% of all fathers taught their children a genuine work ethic- the reality that you work for a living rather than depending upon others, upon the government to support you! While there are those in legitimate need, only God knows the countless individuals that take advantage all because they have "no work ethic". Zebedee, the Bible records, was in the ship with his sons mending the nets. What that meant was this- he was the leading example of work and of integrity in the family. He could have told the boys to mend the nets-but that was not the way Zebedee

operated. He was a doer and not a teller. No doubt he could have told the boys, "Fix those nets so we can get back out to sea." But he was a type of father that taught by example. Zebedee was that type of father who instilled in his boys a deep work ethic, because he knew they were going to watch him. The harder he worked would result in a deeper work ethic for them. In teaching them how to work, Zebedee taught them the value of work, the joy that comes from a hard days work and the satisfaction of resting. Zebedee instilled the work ethic, by modeling it out in his own life. Sadly, the reason that so many children are not willing to work is found in the fact that they have bad examples in their parents. A parent that is unwilling to work, and labor teaches and instill to their children that laziness is the way of life and things are to be handed to them on a silver platter. The reality is a parent who is lazy will find themselves having nothing, and the result will be that their children will find themselves in the same situation. God puts it this way in Proverbs 13:4, *"The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich."*

The reason that so many children are in want and in need is found in the fact that their parents have taught them a lifestyle of laziness. Zebedee was not that way. He taught his sons to work, and he instilled that work ethic that would carry them to the end of their earthly life. Dads, one of the greatest things that you can instill in your child out side of your own witness for Christ, and unconditionally loving your child, is modeling a lifestyle of work. Billy Graham tells the story about getting up at 2:00 each morning to help milk 20 cows. He did it in the morning and evening for years. It was that work ethic that has been in part a key to many accomplishments. Prayer is vital, but prayer means little if there is no willingness to work. James and John would be workers beside the Lord Jesus Christ and their work ethic was instilled in them by their dad!

3. ARE WILLING TO GIVE THEIR CHILDREN OVER TO GOD, IN SPITE OF THE COST. The Bible records the fact that Jesus came walking beside the lake of Galilee. In reality the time that Jesus called to James and John was not really a convenient time. After all they were right in the process of mending the nets for the next catch of fish. Yet, in the midst of the mending of the nets, Jesus called to Zebedee's sons. Whether Zebedee had an idea or not is not revealed in Scripture. Yet, when Jesus called to James and John, Zebedee released his boys to go with Jesus. What a beautiful picture of a parents obedience- releasing your child or children to do what Jesus says. Zebedee never said, "You can't go right now, we're right in the midst of mending nets!" Neither does he tell his boys, "Wait till a better time!" Zebedee was that type of father who realized that the will, agenda, and plan of God came first. Though Zebedee didn't know all that would take place in the lives of the boys, he released his sons into the hands of Jesus. Zebedee had no idea that his son James would be the author of the Book of James, and John would be given the privilege to pen the Gospel of John and the Revelation. None of that was known to Zebedee, but Zebedee knew Jesus well enough that he was willing to give his sons over to his care and somehow he knew that He (Jesus) could make more of the boys than he could ever imagine.

4. ARE WILLING TO PUT THEIR PERSONAL NEEDS LAST. Zebedee and his sons were fishermen, which meant they made their livelihood from the catch of fish. Imagine the thought of 2/3 of your workforce leaving you? In spite of the fact that Zebedee's livelihood depending on catching fish, he was willing to put his needs last for the purposes of Jesus.

Zebedee is not critical of Jesus calling his sons, neither is he critical of his boys leaving to follow Jesus. The fact that they left immediately meant that Zebedee was left probably to mend the nets himself. No doubt, he would miss out on the time those times of being together with his sons. Yet, he was willing to do so for the purposes of God. A dad that counts for eternity is a dad that is willing to give his son or daughter over to the purposes of God, knowing full well that it may involve their children moving away to be all God called them to be. James and John would walk with Jesus for three years, and bear witness to miracles, signs and wonders, that they never would have been privy to if they had remained home.

5. ARE REMEMBERED FOR THEIR UNSELFISH ACTIONS. Many of the disciples fathers are never mentioned, and if they are mentioned in Scripture, it is only a reference to their genealogy. Yet, Zebedee is named 11 times in the New Testament. Most of the time his name is mentioned it is directly linked to his sons. It is as though God is making sure that Zebedee's unselfish act of giving up his sons to follow Jesus does not go unnoticed. While the other disciples are named, very seldom if any, are they linked to their dads. Yet when Zebedee is mentioned it is as though God is declaring to all who read- "Don't forget the unselfish actions of Zebedee- in giving his sons up immediately to follow Christ. A father that gives teaches his children by example and gives his child over to the Lord can never be forgotten for his act of unselfishness. Only God knows the wonderful ways that he rewards fathers for choosing to demonstrate unselfishness. But the fact is clear, God rewards all faithful obedient fathers who are willing to give up their children to count for God and He will reveal his full reward in eternity.