

Homeland Security **1 Thessalonians 2:8-12**

“Homeland Security” is a phrase commonplace since 2001. But Homeland Security has always been a necessity within families. There is a need for homes to be a place of security and safety; a place where young minds, bodies, emotions and souls can grow healthy and thrive. Fathers have much to do with creating the atmosphere of Homeland Security.

On Mother’s Day I was privileged to speak on the subject, “The Sacrifice and Significance of Mothers.” That service was positively received as you loved the opportunity to affirm the sacrifice of mothers you know—some your own moms, some your own wives, and some mothers you have observed in the church. Some of you who are currently walking through the exhausting stages of mothering—like Melody TenKley who gave a fine testimony—were greatly encouraged to know others recognize the sacrifice and significance of mothers.

Today, we come to Father’s Day. During my many years of hearing and delivering Mother’s Day and Father’s Day sermons within the church, I have observed a trend. Mother’s Day sermons tend to be congratulatory and encouraging. Father’s Day sermons tend to be condemnatory and disheartening. Mothers get pats on the back. Fathers get spanked a little lower.

Sure, there are some fathers who deserve to be rebuked. Some of us came from homes in which the father was impatient, angry, even brutal. Some come from homes where the father was lazy; some have workaholics for fathers. Some have alcoholics. Some have fathers who have never grown up, and some have fathers that seem to have never been young. But rather than condemning those who have failed in their father role, let’s congratulate those who have been diligent.

The positive example of good fathers encourages all fathers to do better. We commend fathers who exhibit four traits, providing homeland security for their family. We find these four characteristics in the Bible, but our text presents these four traits through the back door in 1 Thessalonians 2:8-12.

What do I mean “through the back door?” Well, the purpose of the passage is not to teach about four positive traits of fathers. Rather it was written to teach about how Paul was like a good father to the church in Thessalonica. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had come to Thessalonica on the Second Missionary Journey, as described in Acts 17. Apparently, they spent 6 months there, although the passage in Acts just mentions being in their synagogues on three Sabbaths, a strategy that apparently culminated in having to flee from persecution. And those who troubled them even tracked them down to their next stop on their journey in Berea. Eventually, Paul settled again in Athens or perhaps

Corinth, and sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how they were doing. When Timothy returned to Paul and reported on how the church fared, Paul wrote this letter we know as 1 Thessalonians. As we look at chapter 2, we feel the heartbeat of strong emotion from a loving, spiritual father. In verse 11, Paul says he had **“dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children.”** In using this image, Paul communicates how a spiritual leader ought to be toward his church. But also—coming through the back door, as it were—the passage teaches us about four traits of fathers who provide security for their home.

Now as you see these four traits in the passage, be looking for the one trait about which you can genuinely commend to the fathers you know or have seen—in your family or even within the church. And you fathers, look at these four characteristics to see which would be an area of growth for you, the one in which with the Lord’s help, you can do better at.

1. Expressed love (vs. 8)

⁸*We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*

This verse, as it relates to the intensity of love of a spiritual leader toward his church, is so convicting to me personally. To what degree can I—or the other pastors of our church—say, “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you are so dear to us?”

As Paul wrote these words, he had at his fingertips many Greek terms he could have used about love, but he picked a term (*omeiromenoi*) found only this time in all the New Testament. It is a term used in literature outside the Bible as a term of endearment toward babies, the picture of a parent gently cradling an infant.

The expression of a dad’s approval and love is of great importance. This assurance of love needs to be expressed in words and even touch. Studies have demonstrated there is a statistical link between promiscuity in women and lack of affection received from their fathers in childhood. Fathers can do much to fill up the “love tank” of their sons and daughters before they start to fill it up, looking for love in all the wrong places.

I have seen one dad in our church who has modeled this before me for the last decade as his daughters have grown up. I’ve seen him holding hands with them as he walked them to their Sunday School Classroom. Last week I saw him sitting on a pew waiting for church to begin with one of his daughters on his lap. Precious.

Society may have pushed you to think expressed love is the domain of the feminine gender. No, we have equal opportunity here. There are definitely differences between

the sexes, but expressing love should not be one of them. Isn't it great to be a man? I think so! Here are some reasons I'm glad I'm a guy:

- Phone conversations are over in 30 seconds.
- A five-day holiday requires only one suitcase.
- When clicking through the channels, you don't have to pause at any shot of someone crying.
- Car mechanics tell you the truth.
- Gray hair and wrinkles only add character.
- And, if another guy shows up at a party in the same outfit, you just might become lifelong buddies. I like being a masculine man.

[Share the results of the children's survey about their dads. The question, "I love my dad because..."]

But being masculine can also include the trait of expressed love.

2. Hard work, vs. 9

⁹*Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.*

Those fathers who would love to stay home to interact with their family, but instead faithfully go off to work are to be commended for their hard work. The Bible states the importance of this responsibility this way: *"If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."* (1 Timothy 5:8).

I'm thinking of another father in our church who has worked long hours in a stressful job. He would like to have quit. But he hasn't. He shouldered the wage-earning responsibilities to pay the mortgage on his house, to save for the eventual replacement of the shingles, and provide the groceries for his increasingly-hungry growing children. What this father is doing—representative of many fathers here—is a God-given and God-blessed privilege and responsibility.

[Review the two traits seen so far: expressed love + hard work.]

3. Transparent authenticity, vs. 10.

¹⁰*You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.*

"You are witnesses." In other words, the believers in Thessalonica had seen Paul's conduct before them. And, this is also a trait being compared as Paul says he had "dealt

with each of you **as a father deals with his own children.**” Our children are witnesses of our actions and attitudes.

Being transparent means we are willing to show our genuine successes and willing to admit our embarrassing failures. When children see aspects of our life that are “holy, righteous and blameless” they are encouraged to follow in the same path. This does not mean we parade around the house trying to show off our spirituality. When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, the Greatest Sermon Ever Delivered, he said, “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. (Matthew 6:6).” This is a guard against hypocrisy, doing your prayers just for show. In other words, when you are downstairs by yourself reading the newspaper or staring blankly out the window, and you hear your son coming down the stairs, you don’t suddenly whip out your Bible to appear to him as if you are cultivating a daily quiet time with the Lord. No! That’s hypocrisy. That’s practicing your piety before men instead of genuinely seeking God. On the other hand, of course, it is perfectly fine and proper to let your son see your genuine faith. When you really are reading the Scripture by yourself downstairs, you don’t have to quickly put it away when you hear your son’s footfalls on the stairs. Let the young man see your genuine, authentic walk with God.

But, when the prayers are genuine, it is not inappropriate to let others see your example. The Prophet Daniel is an example of this. He understood the significance of King Darius’s decree forbidding prayer. “When Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had a window open toward Jerusalem), and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.” (Daniel 6:10). His genuine fervency was not done for hypocrisy, but neither was it a secret.

That’s the way we fathers live before our family. We don’t practice piety to be seen as pious. We practice our faith, unashamed to be seen.

Of course, transparency also means we can be seen when we make mistakes. This aspect of admitting your faults is particularly difficult to do when the offense has not been against the family itself. Suppose you lost your temper in front of the family. You were so mad you called your wife a name and slammed the door on your way out. After you’ve calmed down, you have two choices. Repent of your attitude and shape up. Or, repent of your attitude, shape up, and verbally, humbling, openly apologize to everyone who heard your rant. That’s humbling. That’s hard. But that is the sacrifice of transparent authenticity.

When a certain father in our church recently got a speeding ticket, I imagine he was tempted to be embarrassed and to cover it up, quietly paying the fine without involving the children. But instead, this father showed his daughter the ticket, and talk to her about how he had been disobedient to the laws, going 48 in a 35 zone. He showed her how much the fine was, and how much it hurts to have to pay it out of his limited budget.

This father let his daughter see his repentance and regret. She may learn from it and apply the lessons on how to admit your faults and accept the consequences. And she'll hold him accountable next time she sees the speedometer.

4. Pro-active involvement, vs. 12.

¹¹*For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,*
¹²*encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.*

The participles used here—these words ending in I-N-G—are all action words requiring pro-activity: encouraging, comforting, urging. They don't just happen by osmosis. It may be easier to take our fathering cues from Sergeant Schultz, "I see nothing!"

But the father pro-actively involved father will not leave it to his wife, will not leave it to Pastor Shon and the youth ministry, will not leave it to chance. The father who provides homeland security will be pro-active. This happens when you see your child is discouraged, and needs encouraging. When a son is hurting, and need comforting. When a daughter is goofing, and need urging. Sometimes, the urging has to be negative, "Don't," and "Stop that." But in a greater ratio children need to hear, "That's great!" "You can do it!" and "I'm proud of you."

[Results of children's survey question, "My favorite memory of my dad was when...]

When my daughters were entering their teen years and boys began to notice them, it would have been easier to coast and look the other way. But, instead, I developed an "Application for Permission To Date My Daughters." The top part is typical background information—name, address, GPA, and Boy Scout Rank. Then there is an essay section:

- "In 50 words or less, what does the word LATE mean to you?"
- "In 50 words or less, what does the phrase, DON'T TOUCH MY DAUGHTER mean to you?"

Then there are some short-answer questions, like:

- "The one thing I hope this application does not ask me about is..."

[If any of your dads want, I've made copies for you.]

Seriously, though, being a father is not a role you can be lackadaisical about. It takes spiritual initiative to fight—yes, fight—for the security of your home..

Dr. James Dobson received a letter from his father than impacted him greatly in raising his children Danae and Ryan. The letter read in part, "*Danae is growing up in the wickedest section of a world much farther gone into moral decline than the world into*

which you were born. I have observed that the greatest delusion is to suppose that our children will be devout Christians simply because their parents have been, or that any of them will enter into the Christian faith in any other way than through their parents; deep travail of prayer and faith. But this prayer demands time, time that cannot be given if it is all signed and conscripted and laid on the altar of career ambition. Failure for you at this point would make mere success in your occupation a very pale and washed-out affair, indeed.”

Paul worked with the Thessalonians “as a father deals with his own children.” He exhibited the four characteristics to be commended here today in 2009—the masculine traits of expressed love, hard work, transparent authenticity, and pro-active involvement. If any of you dads have identified one area in which you need improvement, throw yourself in dependency upon the Lord. You cannot just change. You need his strength as you re-dedicate yourself to being a better father in the future than you have been in the past.

Thank you, fathers, for your investment into the lives of your sons and daughters. Children are wet cement, yet to set up. These little ones, kicking in their cribs are tomorrow’s leaders with powerful potential. They are the arrows from our bows, with their direction dependent on our guidance. They are the receivers of our batons, when we begin to tire.

Looking around this congregation, I see that many of you men have passed the baton of primary parenting responsibility to the next generation. You now are grandparents or great-grandparents. You, too, can supplement the provision of Homeland Security to your extended family. Sometimes grandparents have gained the wisdom with their years and can even recover the fumbles of past short-sightedness.

I appreciate a little book about a Grandfather and a Grandmother called *Safed and Keturah*, written in King James style. Here’s the chapter, “Seeing the Fire Engine.”

Seeing the Fire Engine

My little grandson came unto my house, and he was Sobbing. And I inquired, saying, Why is my little lad grieved? And he burst into piteous Lamentation, and he cried, I want to see the Fire Engine. And his mother spake, saying, We came past the Engine House, and the Firemen were Washing to Engine. And he desired to tarry, but I said, We will stop as we return from the Post-office. And behold, when we returned, the Firemen had taken the Engine inside, so that we saw it no more.

There are sorrows great and sorrows small; but the sorrow of the small boy who hath desired to see the Fire Engine and hath not seen it is the Sorrow of Calamity. And the little lad cried sore, saying, I want to see the Fire Engine. And I said, Come with me, for we shall surely see the First

Engine. And as we started, there came a man to see me, but I said, Tarry thou till I return, or come again another day, for I am busy.

And we went unto the Engine House. And I spake unto the Chief, and I saluted him, and he saluted me. And I said, We desire to see the Fire Engine. And the Chief took the little lad and set him on high, so that he sat far up on the seat behind the Steering Wheel. And the Chief gave him the Bell Rope, and the little lad pulled the rope so that the Bell Rang. And he saw the Ladders and the Truck, and the Whole Business. And certain of the Firemen ascended the stairs, and slid down the Brass Pole that he might see how they descended when there was a Fire. And the little lad had the Time of his Life. Moreover, I had a Pretty Tolerably Good time myself. For I am not too old to remember when I chased the Fire Engine.

So the little lad and I we came home again...and his mother said, Have you two Small Boys seen the Fire Engine? And we answered and said, We have seen it. And the lad told about the High Seat and the Bell and the Brass Pole.

Now it came to pass that night when I said my Prayers, that I spake unto my wife saying, Some good things have I done this day, and some it may be not so good. But one mighty good deed have I done: I let my work Go Hang for an hour while I went with the lad to see the Fire Engine.

For he who doeth a kind deed unto a little child, doeth it for all the long years that lie ahead of that young life. Wherefore do I say unto all men, Skimp not thy deeds of kindness to any sort of man or woman, but the good deed that lasteth longest is that which thou shalt do unto a little child. And moreover, it is an Whole Lot of Fun. (*Safed and Keturah*, pages 77-78).

Abraham Lincoln believed much the same about investing in children. He never paid more than minimum courtesy to the adults whom he passed on the street, but when Abe Lincoln passed a child, he doffed his hat. "These adults I know," he said, "but who knows what the children may become?"

Praise God and thank you fathers who are growing in the four masculine traits of expressed love, hard work, transparent authenticity, and pro-active involvement. You are laying the foundation of Homeland Security for your children and your children's children.