

The Servant Father **Johnny C. Parker**

One Friday morning I answered my home phone, and a familiar voice on the other end of the line greeted me saying, “Hey, what’s happening?” As the conversation progressed, the caller paused, and sympathetically stated: “*I can hear your son in the background, you must be baby-sitting.*” Smilingly, I replied, “**Babysitting?**”, “*No! I am not baby-sitting; but I am here enjoying the joys of fathering.*” A moment of silence ensued as their statement made me wonder why, people quickly labels us dads as baby-sitters when we happen to be alone with our children? While on the other hand, mothers are rarely ever viewed in this way. As I reflected further, I reminded myself, that unfortunately, there are some fathers who behave like unpaid baby-sitters. They eagerly await the return of mom, so they may be relieved of their “agonizing duty” of watching their children.

The art of fathering is eroding in our society in general and sadly in the African-American community in particular. A high rate of alcoholism amongst males, coupled with the staggering number of men in jail is driving up the alarming instances of single mother households. On the other hand some fathers are choosing the boardrooms over the family rooms. This choice is just as damaging to good fathering, as the men who are affected by alcoholism, or imprisonment.

During the late 1970’s many popular songs like, “Papa Was A Rolling Stone,” and “Cat’s In The Cradle” hyped the failure of fathers. Ironically these songs were performed by the same men who vividly described their “daddy pains” and “daddy hunger.” Unfortunately many of the fathers in these popular songs shared a common trait. They all lacked commitment, spiritual direction, and most importantly, a healthy relationship with their families.

In sharp contrast to the aforementioned fathers is the *servant father*. The word Father is derived from the Greek word *pater*, whose literal English translation is *paternal*. *Paternal* describes ones who nourishes, a protector, and an upholder. These are the hooks on which a servant father hangs both his calling, and his responsibility before his heavenly Father, God. Let us now explore six fundamental characteristics of a servant father.

First, *a servant father has a personal and vibrant relationship with his heavenly Father God, through his son Jesus Christ.* He must demonstrate to his children that they can “*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 11:1). He leads by example not by dictatorship of parental authority. He is obedient to Gods calling and is moved by the Holy Spirit in all his actions. He is a model for his children to emulate.

Second, *a servant father provides emotional and spiritual nourishment for his children.*

Anorexia is a condition, in which a person starves them self, sometimes to death. Some children experience spiritual and emotional anorexia because their fathers have starved them of much needed love and guidance. Children are hungrier for **time with you dad**, than they are for material things. Prioritize your time, to regularly have cherished time with your child like a meal, or a walk in the park alone with them. Participate with them in activities they enjoy. Regularly read the Bible with them, (i.e. Proverbs) while having fun memorizing scripture. A healthy relationship with dads is what many children desire the most.

Third, *a servant father is a protector.* He serves his children by providing for their physical well-being. He protects them financially by fulfilling their immediate needs, while also planning for their future (i.e. life insurance, wills, college tuition). He sows the seeds for their financial future by teaching them Biblical principles of finance, and he protects their relationships by being a model of qualities they should seek in their friendships.

Fourth, *a servant father encourages and uplifts his children.* He builds them up with positive words of affirmation like – “you’re a great kid”, “I am so proud of you”, “you are special”, “I am happy to be

your father”, “I like how you handled that situation.” He avoids negative phrases like, “you could have done better!”, and “you’ll never amount to anything.” A servant father carefully balances the “rod” of corporal discipline and “reproof” of verbal correction.

Fifth, *a servant father is approachable*. Although a child should honor their father by respecting his authority, they should also feel safe and comfortable approaching him. God, our Heavenly Father, declares that we should fear him reverentially (**Deuteronomy 8:6**), yet He invites us to “... *come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy*” (**Hebrews 4:16**).

Finally, *a servant father is humble*. He is always willing to set aside his pride and humble himself to make amends with his children. (**Proverbs 29:23**) “*A man's pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit*”. Fathers, even if your children are grown and on their own. If you failed them in any way, it is *never too late* to apologize and begin rebuilding bridges of trust with them. Have the courage to humble yourself and admit your wrong, and then seek their forgiveness. Irregardless of how they respond you will know that you have done the right thing in obedience to God, your heavenly father.

Dad, if your children were to sing a song about you, how would the lyrics read? Whether or not you deliberately fashion one, you are leaving a legacy for your children. The question is, what kind of legacy will you leave for them? Will your heavenly father, God be able to say “*well done good and faithful servant*” (**Matthew 25:23**).