

Cat.2 # 6 The Father's role, its limitation and completion

By Pieter Bos.

The “man leaves his father and mother” by receiving the “fatherly blessing”: a life changing moment for any young man or woman. The father's role leads somewhere and finishes at a certain point.

In a previous blog I said: “The role of the father is to invite his children, both boys and girls, to leave the protection of the mother and get ready for their independent role of taking care of themselves”. An awesome task; can it ever be limited and completed?

A child needs both protection AND challenge, to be careful AND to be daring; it needs the mother AND the father. The father leads his child out of the protection (of the mother) into the challenges and opportunities and dangers and chances of the world, the world God has created, whatever the devil has made of it. The father represents God for his son and his daughter, and shows them around in His creation, takes them into adventure, wonders about the unknown, models their responses, exercises in case of any resistance. The father “leads them out!” All the patience of coaching is required: explaining what to do, show how to do it, make the child try to do it and evaluate the whole process. On top he should encourage to not give up. Be it chores around the house, homework for school, relating to kids and grownups, finding out about the other sexe and other races, relating to believers and unbelievers, relating to God.

An absent father, a workaholic father, an ill-tempered father, an unfaithful father or an abusive father does not model God and undermine the child at its core.

And now comes the point: The father is given around 20 years to complete this job (13-30 years, depending on culture). That is the limitation! He finishes off his task by publicly and joyfully giving his son, his daughter the “father's blessing”, the public and confirming declaration: “You are ready to go, ready for life, able to take care of yourself and your spouse, able and geared to follow God; I gladly and with confidence release you into adulthood! (and no fatherly controlling from now on!)” Jesus' earthly father had probably passed away when he turned 30. So God, his heavenly father, opened heaven and shouted down, for everyone to hear: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased!” It is the father's blessing that crowns the upbringing of a young man and a young woman. And when the earthly father is not around, God is willing to take care of that through a ‘father-in-the-Lord”. (A faint reminiscence is visible when the father “gives the bride away” to the groom.)

This event should be preceded by an eye-to-eye talk in which the father asks whether there is any wrong in their past for which he has to ask forgiveness; this is in order to prevent a bitter root to spring up later.

I pray for fathers who invest themselves in their children and who have the authority to bring this wonderful task to completion.

The father's role

It is fairly clear what *the mother's role* is in the life of a child: carrying, giving birth, caring. All three involve a degree of sacrifice. And most women fulfil this role with an astonishing strength and joy. So, what is the role of the father? When the pregnant woman whispers to the baby: “Baby, I will always take care of you,” the father whispers: “Baby, when are you coming out, then we'll go bike-riding”. After the birth, when the woman whispers: “Baby, I will always take care of you,” the father takes the baby in his arms and shows it to everyone, saying: “He will be the best football player in the street, she will be the cleverest girl in the school.”

When the young mother tells her toddler who just fell down and got scratched: “Baby, I will always take care of you,” the father says: “Never mind now, come on and I'll teach you something dangerous!” When the child starts going to school, and the mother says: “Baby, I will always take care of you,” the father says: “I'll teach you something they didn't know yet when I went to school.” And when the student goes to college, the mother says: “Baby, you can always come back.” But the father says: “You are ready, you can do it, go for it!”

In other words: the mother continues to care and protect. That is her nature and her gifting. But the father is always saying: “When will you come out... come on and we'll go out together, go on, you can strike out for yourself.” The role of the father is to invite his children, both boys and girls, to leave the protection of the mother and get ready for their independent role of taking care of themselves. That is his nature and task.

How many parents have had disputes about the upbringing of their children, because the mother wanted to go on caring and the father wanted to let go – and how often have they pushed each other to extremes? How many girls and boys have suffered because their father did not empower them and bless them into adulthood? How many

clever or desperate teenagers have played off their parents against each other, because the roles of father and mother were muddled and unclear?

And how many healthy men and women can testify that their father has taught them a proper self-confidence, by example, by encouragement, by discipline and letting go?

I pray for many fathers to be role-models and examples.