



TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

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WE NEED CHRISTIAN FATHERS THAT CARE

We need Christian fathers to be real men of God. We need every single father that is in the Lord to care about himself and each member of the family of which he serves as the head. What is there that Christian fathers ought to care about?

Every Christian father should **care enough about his role as a father to take his responsibilities seriously**. God has given specific instructions for Christian dads, so *He* certainly takes a father's role seriously (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21). Fathers who do not put forth their maximum effort to be the best father possible are failing their kids, failing their entire family, and failing the church. If all fathers would take their role as a father as seriously as they do their jobs, financial investments, and leisure activities, many families and local churches would be a whole lot stronger.

Every Christian father should **care enough about his children to spend time with them**. Many kids officially live under the same roof that their father does, but he rarely takes time to be with them. He supplies funds for their physical and educational needs, but he is not there to communicate with them and show his love for them. Some Christian fathers have realized their shortcoming in this area, but for some of them it was too late – their kids had grown and left home. Brother, do not let that happen in your family. Spend much quality time with your kids.

Each Christian father needs to **care enough about his kids to take a personal interest in what each one of them is doing**. The apostle Paul wrote this about his past work among the saints in Thessalonica: “*As you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children*” (1 Thessalonians 2:11). What is expected of a father? In part, that he exhort, comfort, and charge each one of his own kids. That requires that he know what they are doing. A real father does not turn the upbringing of his kids over to others. His wife and other relatives can help, but they can never take a father's place. Kids need their fathers to play a major role in their lives. Dads must show genuine interest in them, including their needs, their desires, their dreams, and areas in their lives in which they need to do better.

All Christian fathers should **care enough about their kids to teach them how to be responsible and practice self-discipline**. Fools despise wisdom

and instruction (Proverbs 1:7), and it is also true that foolish and lazy fathers fail to share wisdom and instruction with their children. Kids do not take responsibility and show self-control by accident. They need guidance. Fathers need to take the lead in providing this guidance. What about those cases in which a child makes choices that go against God's ordained arrangement of authority?

Every Christian father should **care enough about his kids to discipline them**. “*Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect*” (Hebrews 12:9). God expects a Christian father to help his children understand the need to respect authority and follow rules. He also expects them to show their kids that actions have consequences. A father that loves his child disciplines him promptly, while a dad “*who spares his rod hates his son.*” The Bible says so (Proverbs 13:24).

Each Christian father needs to **care enough about his kids to teach them the Bible**. That is surely a significant part of what God intends for fathers to do: “*And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4). God has always wanted His people to teach His word to their kids (Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 6:7). Bible classes organized by a congregation can help children grow in their knowledge of the truth, but fathers are the ones who are ultimately responsible for their kids being grounded in the truth. No excuse for failure in this area is acceptable! When kids raised in a Christian home do not know the Bible well, that says a lot about their fathers.

All Christian fathers need to **care enough about their kids to set the right example before them**. Little eyes are watching and little ears are hearing what fathers say. Faithful fathers will be able to tell their kids, “*The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you*” (Philippians 4:9). A father's pattern, whether good or bad, can go a long way in influencing his children to choose the path that leads to life or the one that leads to destruction.

Christian father, take your responsibilities seriously. Your wife, your kids, and the church need you to be a good father. Demonstrate by your action and speech that you really care. May God bless you.

-- Roger D. Campbell

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF JOSEPH, THE SON OF JACOB

Smith's Bible Dictionary lists ten men in the Bible with the name "Joseph." In fact, two of those ten had a father named "Jacob." The one who is the focus of our study is the Joseph about whom we read in Genesis 37-50, the son of Rachel. Yes, he is the one to whom his father gave a beautiful coat, and he is the one whose brothers sold him into slavery. We need to go beyond the facts of Joseph's life and learn lessons that we can apply in our own lives. Let us take a look.

Joseph was both loved and hated. Most of us could say the same about our own lives, right? "*Now Israel loved Joseph . . . But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him . . .*" (Genesis 37:3,4; emphasis mine, *rdc*). Being loved does not mean that you are the greatest person in the world, nor does the fact that you might be hated make you the worst one, either. Jesus was both despised and adored, as were His apostles. Being liked and disliked is just a part of life, even for those that faithfully serve the Lord. Like Joseph, we must not allow the love that we receive to cause us to be arrogant, nor should we allow others' hatred of us to cause us to develop a bitter spirit. Whether we are loved dearly or hated intensely, life goes on.

Joseph had to endure unpleasant circumstances. The following realities of his life come to mind immediately: he lived with ten brothers that hated him, he was sold into slavery, against his will he was forced to live in a foreign country, and he was wrongfully cast into prison. Each of us has had experiences in life that were not enjoyable. But, can any of us truthfully say that we have endured the kind of situations that Joseph faced? Let us avoid the temptation to complain when severe challenges or hard times come our way. Jesus suffered wrongfully, too. His response to such serves as a great lesson for each of us (1 Peter 2:19-23).

Joseph was blessed immensely. Could we not say the same about every one of us?! But wait a minute, did we not just observe that Joseph was mistreated? Yes. Despite that, he was still blessed. That is right. When Joseph was both a slave and a prisoner, the Bible says that "*The LORD was with him*" (Genesis 39:2,21,23). Can you name a greater blessing than having the Lord God on your side? There could be nothing better! Again, no matter what happens in our lives, if God walks with us, that is what really counts.

Joseph maintained his purity. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him (Genesis 39:7-14). Make no mistake about it: her efforts to get him to engage in immoral conduct were intense. She directly asked him to sleep with her. She touched his body. She daily approached him. To Joseph's credit, he never gave in to her. He realized that such action would be wicked in God's sight (39:9). Joseph was in a faraway land. Perhaps no one would ever know. He was still a young man, and young people enjoy physical pleasure, too. Joseph did not use any of these matters as an excuse to make a sinful decision. He started out pure and

remained that way. That sounds like a good model for all Christians, regardless of their age.

Joseph was able to "see the big picture." How did Joseph end up in Egypt as a slave and later as second in command in the whole nation? Joseph looked beyond the fact that his brothers sold him into slavery. He saw God's hand in it. Hear Joseph's explanation to his brothers: ". . . *for God sent me before you to preserve life . . . And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives . . . So now it was not you who sent me here, but God . . .*" (Genesis 45:5-8). Joseph's role was to help preserve the children of Israel, meaning that he was helping preserve the seed of the promised Messiah. Joseph was able to look past his own life and see "the big picture." You and I must do the same.

Joseph was willing to forgive those who sinned against him. Twenty-two years after Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, they came to Egypt to buy food and he revealed to them just who he was. Instead of using his position of authority to take revenge on them, instead of threatening them, instead of yelling at them, he calmly said, "*But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sent me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life*" (Genesis 45:5). After their father died, Joseph's brothers pleaded for forgiveness, saying, "*Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father*" (Genesis 50:17). What was Joseph's response? He wept, then told them, "*Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good . . .*" (50:17,19). It is not always easy to forgive those that have done us wrong, but if we are truly grateful for the forgiveness that we have received from the Lord, then "*forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave us*" (Ephesians 4:32) should come naturally for us.

Joseph showed tremendous faith in what the Lord said. Before his death, Joseph told his brothers, "*I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob . . . God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here*" (Genesis 50:24,25). How do we know that Joseph spoke those words by faith? The Bible says so: "*By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones*" (Hebrews 11:22). Look at Joseph's thought process: God promised that He would bring us (Israelites) to the Land of Canaan, so since God always keeps His promises, I want you to take my bones to Canaan and bury them there. What great faith! God has also given us great and precious promises (2 Peter 1:4). We need to accept them by faith and trust totally in Him, always looking to the spiritual land of promise that is called "heaven."

-- Roger D. Campbell

WHAT REALLY DOES MATTER MOST IN LIFE?

"Physical health." "Family." "Making money." "Happiness." No doubt these are some of the more popular answers that we would receive if we asked adults what really matters the most to them.

Without question, the status of one's physical health has a tremendous influence on his/her life in a number of ways. And, we all easily see the significant role a person's family plays in his/her life. What about making money? In most cases, when one has no money he is unable to obtain needed products or to receive certain services. Yes, having money is important. The fourth item in the list, "happiness" or peace of mind, is also of great value, although one might count himself as "the happiest fellow in the world" and yet not be the kind of person that the Lord wants him to be.

The word that comes to mind when we consider what really matters most in life is the word "priority." "Priority" is defined as "Something which takes precedence; something which must be done or taken care of first" [*Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus*, 1997]. So, the question that must be asked is, "Should the items noted above take top priority in my life, or is there something that I ought to consider even more important than my physical health, my family, making money, and my personal happiness?" Indeed, there is something of far greater importance.

The Lord Jesus said, *"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Mark 8:36,37). The Christ makes it sound as if the welfare of a person's soul is of supreme importance, does He not? Remember, the definition of "priority" is "something which must be done or taken care of first." Did not the Master have something to say about "keeping first things first?" He did, indeed: *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matthew 6:33). There is no way to escape the force of Jesus' demand: God and His Cause must be first in the heart and life of a follower of the Messiah. Putting God's Cause any place but first is not acceptable! That is not an idea that originated in the 21st century, and it is not a concept that came from modern-day bishops or preachers. It came from the Son of the living God!

Non-Christians sometimes think it is strange or crazy that faithful disciples of Jesus consider Him and His kingdom as more precious than anything else in life. Sadly, even some members of the Christ's church look at their brothers and sisters in the Lord as being fanatical or out of touch with reality when they see that those godly children of God have their priorities in the proper order: Jesus is first, then everything and everybody else comes

after Him.

Another passage that speaks plainly about priorities in the life of a member of the church is Colossians 3:2 – "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." The choice is ours: we can either devote ourselves above all else to earthly affairs, or else we can make heavenly/spiritual affairs our top concern. But know this: the consequences of our choice will be eternal.

"And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength: this is the first commandment" (Mark 12:30). That sounds familiar, does it not? True, that was the message of the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 6:5), and Jesus quoted it to a Jewish person at a time when the old law was still in force. However, loving the Lord and His cause above all else is also a great demand of the teaching of the Christ (John 14:15; Colossians 3:2).

Jesus will one day raise all the dead. Some will be raised unto "the resurrection of life," while for others it will be "the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28,29). What will be the determining factor as to whether a person will go into eternal life or eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46)? Each person will be judged according to *"the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10). Those who had their focus in this life on something other than the Christ and service to Him will have eternity to think about their tragic decision not to make Him the center of their lives.

We would not for a moment try to minimize the great importance of a person working to maintain his physical health, loving and enjoying his family, making money to be able to provide for himself and others, or trying to be happy. These all have their proper place in life. But, let us all admit and accept this truth: none of these are God's answer to the question that serves as the title of this article: "What really does matter most in life?" What matters most in life is for us to fulfill our responsibility to our Lord to love Him and put His Cause above all others.

We close with one final consideration. When you and I make out our yearly plans, where does our service to Jesus fit in? When you and I make out our plans for each month, where does our service to Jesus fit in? When you and I make out our "things to do" list every week, do we have the Lord's Cause foremost in our thoughts? Finally, when we make our plans for each day, things that we just "must" get done, where does our service to the Christ fit in? May the Lord and His Cause always be our heart's first love. Let us keep first things first.

-- Roger D. Campbell

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 – THE GIVING OF THE MACEDONIAN SAINTS

More than once we read in the New Testament about the giving that the churches in the region of Macedonia did. Congregations in that area were located in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and perhaps elsewhere. They supported the apostle Paul when he preached in Corinth and other places (2 Corinthians 11:8,9; Philippians 4:15,16).

However, it is the tremendous giving that the Macedonian churches did in another matter that really catches our eye. The first five verses in 2 Corinthians 8 reveal this message about their giving:

(1) Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: (2) that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. (3) For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, (4) imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. (5) And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

What can we learn from the contributions that these brethren in the Lord from the distant past made? There really are some great lessons here.

First, they gave even when they were in a condition that the Bible calls "*a great trial of affliction*" (8:2). We are encouraged by their example for it shows us that it is possible to remain steadfast even when trials abound in life. Their action also reminds us that in the specific matter of giving, a child of God can continue to give to the Lord even when he/she is facing trials.

Second, they had abundant joy, even though they were afflicted. To many it may sound like a fantasy to speak of being happy in the midst of afflictions, but these brethren remind us that it can be done (James 1:2,3).

Third, despite their economic status – they were in "*deep poverty*," they were liberal in their giving. Thus, we understand that liberality in giving has nothing to do with the amount of one's income or bank account. We recall what Jesus said about a woman that gave only two coins (which was all she had): "*Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all*" (Luke 21:3). Once again, as we think of the Christians of Macedonia, we may smile and shake our heads

in amazement at the seeming contradictions that existed in their lives: affliction and joy, poverty and liberality.

Fourth, they went beyond their power or ability in the actual amount that they gave (8:3). We should never see giving as some sort of competition with others, and giving more or less than others proves nothing about how acceptable our giving is to God. Those Macedonian saints were remarkable, though, were they not? There they were in deep poverty, facing great trials of affliction, and all they did was step up and contribute beyond their ability. What an example!

Fifth, in spite of their financial woes, the Macedonians gave freely or willingly (8:3). They exemplified the teaching of 2 Corinthians 9:7 – that giving is to be done "*not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver*." They did not have much money, but they were willing to part with a huge portion of what they had in order to help the Lord's Cause and His people.

Sixth, they basically begged to be allowed to have a part in contributing to help the poor saints (8:4). They prayed or implored Paul and those with him to accept their funds. We might imagine someone begging to be *excused* from giving, but these folks were begging to *participate* in this contribution for the poor among the saints (Romans 15:25,26).

Seventh, before they gave their money to the Lord's work, they first gave themselves to the Lord (8:5). With them, their heart went first and their generous contribution followed. If our hearts are truly devoted to our Master, then we, too, will give in the sacrificial, selfless manner that the Macedonians did.

The first-century Christians that lived in the region of Macedonia were not some type of sinless Supermen or Superwomen. They were common people. In fact, they were poor, common people. But, they were poor, common people with a heart, a big heart that was committed to the Lord Jesus and His Cause above all else. Their giving was only one aspect of their spiritual lives, but what we read in the Bible about the giving which they did is certainly worthy of our serious study, frequent meditation, and ongoing imitation.

-- Roger D. Campbell

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