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BECOMING SONS WHO ARE PLEASING TO THE FATHER

Almost, every night when I go to bed, and every morning in my quiet time, I pray this prayer: “God may I become a son who is pleasing to you.” Let me tell you why I pray this way, and why I believe this prayer has been a major force in enabling me to move along on the road towards becoming God’s sexual man.

In an earlier chapter I said that our character—for you and me, our manly character—forms a part of what we call our hearts. We can readily see how those virtues of manhood described in Chapter 4—strength, resoluteness, courage and honor—all help form the heart of men who will act righteously in the face of sexual temptation. We seek to develop those qualities in ourselves, and with God’s help, we actually do become stronger, more resolute, more courageous and more honorable men.

But there is a potential risk here. When we pursue these virtues, there comes a time when we start to recognize them in ourselves, and when we do, two of men’s most common pitfalls are apt to strike us: pride and narcissism. Just as sinful man can turn his God-given sexual desire into lust, so can he turn his strength and courage and other manly virtues into pride. And then, ironically, when the Christian man fights his prideful feelings, he may become even more self-focused, more of a narcissist. I believe that man’s two greatest vulnerabilities are lust and pride, and frankly from personal experience, I don’t know which is the harder to overcome.

The best way I know to fend off this tendency towards pride while developing our manly virtues is to seek to view ourselves primarily as sons of the Father. There are any number of reasons why this can be tremendously effective. First, and foremost, it places our eyes more on the Father and less on ourselves. He becomes the subject and we, quite appropriately, become the object. We look to His standards for our manhood, rather than comparing ourselves with other men. We can always find men compared to whom we are in some way superior.

There is no doubt that God wants us to view our relationship with Him as like a father-son relationship. Scripture is filled with references to God as Father and to us as sons. Here is one of the most powerful:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Galatians 4:4-7

Ponder this. What an incredible blessing it is to be considered a son and heir of the God of the universe! This sonship should be a central point of reference in our relationship with God. Let's explore it further.

Whether we have been a part of a loving bonded father-son relationship or not, I think all men know intuitively what a loving active father-son relationship can be like. A little boy comes into

the world with the needs that only a father can fill, and he searches for a father to fulfill those needs. In grown men, unless sin has destroyed it, God has placed a father's heart that longs to have a son and to impart to him whatever manhood the father possesses.

For those of us who have sons, we know first hand how we love our sons and the passion we feel for them to become the finest men they can become. And among those men who do not have sons, could there be many who do not imagine having a son, and thinking of the man he could one day become? Or how about men who have no biological son but encounter a young man who stirs up the father heart in them? I have seen this happen over and over again.

On the other side, from our experience as sons, those men who had an active, loving, present father know the joy of a good father-son relationship. But even those men—and there are far too many of them today—whose fathers were physically or emotionally absent in their lives, can know by the pain of the empty places in their hearts what a father's love means, or is meant to mean.

If I may get personal (and boastful) for a minute, let me tell you about my son and me. I could be included among the last group of men just mentioned, those whose fathers were emotionally absent. My father was a kind, gentle man, but for most of my life, was mentally ill, almost constantly in a deep depression. He could barely cope with life, much less be an active father to a son. I am quite certain that my seventeen years of active homosexuality was a futile attempt to find a man who would fill some of the empty places in me that my lack of a father relationship had left.

Eighteen months after my conversion and healing, God gave me a son. I was 40 and my wife close to it. Stephen's sisters, Laura and Beth, were 12 and 13 respectively when he was born. His life, and especially his growth into manhood, has brought one incredible joy after another into my life. I don't love Steve any more than I love his sisters, but my love for him is a somewhat different kind of love. For Laura and Beth my love is tender, and even though their husbands have become their primary protectors, my love still has a strong protective element in it. I admire them tremendously for the women they have become, but my admiration is rooted in relationships; the kind of wives, mothers, sisters, friends, and yes, daughters they have become.

With Steve it is different. The protective element is not nearly as strong, but my love for him has been filled with a desire to see him become the best man he can become, and

with joy for the man he is today. My thirty plus years with him have shown better than anything else what a father-son relationship can be, and has given me a hint of how my heavenly Father relates to me.

Given my background, I had great fears about raising a son, especially with his older sisters ready to assume the roles of mothers #2 and #3. But through my awareness of my own unmet father needs, and with my growing relationship with my heavenly Father, I seemed to have known what a boy needed in order to grow into a strong, solid manhood. Today Steve is a good father and a good husband. His fulltime service with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes suggests the kind of man he is; a leader, a physical man, a man who loves the Lord, a man with a servant heart. Steve helped build the “in-law” addition to his house in which my wife and I now live. My son, Steve, has been a delight to me every day of his life.

God created the family to bless us, but I think He also created it give us signs, very clear signs, of how He wants to relate to us, and us to Him. Marriage reveals His relationship to the Church; an intimate love relationship in which He is the bridegroom and we, the church, His bride. He gave us the ability to become parents that we might join Him in the great process of creating life. And He established the father-son relationships to show us men how He cares for us and what His desires are for us as his sons.

Jesus gave us the Prodigal Son story to show us the heart of the Father. If my Steve were to do something terribly wrong, I don't think I would be angry with him. I know I wouldn't love him any the less. But I would be sad, terribly sad. I think the Father feels that way about us. He isn't angry when we sin. He certainly doesn't love us any less. But I believe He is sad. Whenever I sin, sexually, or otherwise, I sense I have saddened and disappointed the Father, the Father who wants so much more for me. When I act with strength and virtue, I sense His joy.

It is okay for us to pray for righteousness, to pray that we become sexually pure. But I think it is better to pray that we become sons who are in every way pleasing to the Father. Sometimes our prayers for sexual purity can be prayers for our own lily-whiteness, prayers motivated by a desire to feed an almost Pharisaical pride. This can be so especially with men who suffer from low self-esteem in other areas. We want righteousness so that we can feel good about ourselves. Prayers that acknowledge that our righteousness is through him and *for* him will help us avoid this trap.

Our desire and prayers to become sons who are a delight to the Father can do another great thing. They can move us in the direction of becoming more like Jesus. We are modeling ourselves after Jesus, the Son with whom we are told the Father was well pleased (Matthew 3:17 and 17:5). Jesus wanted to please the Father and Jesus did please the Father. Jesus, as a son, was totally submissive to the Father without diminishing in any way His manly qualities.

Being motivated by the law or being motivated by a desire to please God can have the same immediate results, but long term, especially as regards our growth as God's sexual

men, there is a world of difference. The law cannot change us. Our relationship with the Lord is the prime and ultimate source of change in our lives, and our sense of sonship gives that relationship greater meaning and power in our lives.

As you and I pursue the qualities that will make us sons who are pleasing to the Father, our hearts will be changed.