

Humility in Fatherhood

Drawing Near to God

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“What do you think about birth control?” That’s a rather personal question, isn’t it? As pastor I do a lot of premarital counselling, and that’s a question I ask of every couple. It’s a personal question, but not for the reason that they might think. It’s a personal question because I’m asking them to reveal something about their heart. They may not even realize it themselves, but that’s what it is.

The answer that I often get is something like, “We don’t plan on having kids right away. We want to get used to each other first.” If you think about it though, that doesn’t actually make sense. After all, you’ve been seeing each other for a few years already. You’re already used to each other in that sense. So what you’re really saying is that you want to get married and then avoid any further change after that, at least for a while. And when you do experience change, you want it to be on your own terms.

But what if change is actually fundamental to our spiritual growth as men? What if we’ve bought into a secular way of thinking that has actually robbed us of something beautiful? What if the world has taught us to avoid something that God had intended for our good?

Most of us are already pursuing change in our lives. But it tends to be a nicer version of what we already have. A better ute. A renovation on the house. Maybe some new gear. But those are all changes in your circumstances. None of that changes you on the inside. Fatherhood does.

GOD USES FATHERHOOD TO DRAW US INTO THE PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL CHANGE

God uses fatherhood to draw us into the process of spiritual change. God is a good father. And a good father doesn’t just do things for his children. A good father does things with his children. That’s how they grow in their relationship with their father. God does the same with us.

How does he do that? He created the first father, Adam, in Paradise. He made him out of the dust of the earth. And he made Eve, out of Adam’s rib. But every human being since then, with the exception of Jesus, has been begotten from a human father. God does not continue creating out of the dust of the earth. Instead, he has seen fit to draw us into his work. The human race is continued and increased through us.

God our Father has given fathers the enormous honour of drawing us into his ongoing creative work. We are no longer children who watch what their father does from a distance. Instead, he draws us into his creative work. He fashions each human being out of us. Not out of dust, but out of a sperm and an egg. When you beget a child, God is drawing you into his creative work. It’s not just a change in circumstances. It’s not that God imposes children on your life and then asks you to accommodate yourself. No, God actually involves us in that work in the most personal way possible.

So that is already tremendously humbling. We are an integral part of the first birth. But God also involves us in the second birth. The first birth is the physical birth into this world. The second birth is regeneration, when a person comes to faith.

DRAWN INTO REGENERATION

Children who are raised in a Christian home often don’t remember when they came to faith. I sometimes ask my preconfession students, “Do you remember when you first knew that you believed?” Generally they can’t tell me. They just know that they were raised in the faith, and at some point it became their own. That’s a beautiful thing. It means that the Lord used their parents to bring them to saving faith, very early on in their young lives. You as fathers get to

play a key role in that. God uses your leadership in the home as part of this. Not only does God draw you into his work of creation so to speak, but he also draws you into his work of regeneration.

It is true that we can't give our children faith. In the Nicene Creed we confess, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life." That goes for physical life as well as spiritual life. We can't give our children faith. But we can create conditions in which their faith will grow. And God involves us in that work.

A big part of creating these conditions is making room for change in our own lives. If my children see that I'm open to God's work of change in my life, they'll be more open to that work of change in their lives as well. But if I don't see the need to change, and if I actively resist change, then why should they change?

Only God is unchanged by his work of creation. We, however, are changed when he draws us in. And that's by design. To be drawn into God's creative work is to be drawn into something that is so much bigger than our own preferences. We learn that we're not in control. Think about all the things that are beyond our control. We can't control the outcome of conception. We can't control how the pregnancy goes. We can't control how our wife reacts. We can't control what happens during birth. We can't control when the baby cries. We can't control anything. That changes us. It humbles us.

CHANGE REVEAL AREAS FOR GROWTH IN OUR OWN LIVES

How does change reveal areas for growth in our own lives? Often it brings out things in us that we didn't know were there. Maybe our wife changed in ways that we weren't expecting. Maybe she's less available, or we're getting less sleep, or we have more expenses. That can bring all sorts of things to the surface in our life. Now it's easy to blame everything else for the way that we react. But the fact is that all those things that come to the surface were there already. They were just hidden. But the baby doesn't make us impatient. The baby just makes our existing impatience come to the surface.

It takes a lot of humility to acknowledge these things. Maybe we thought about ourselves in a certain way. We thought we were patient, or kind, or considerate, or self-sacrificing. And then it turns out that we're actually not who we thought we were. But here is where we encounter God's creative work in our own lives. When he draws us in, it reveals areas in our own lives where we need to grow. That's grace. He doesn't just show us where to change, but he also works that change in us when we turn to him in faith. If we blame others, we're missing out on an opportunity for tremendous growth.

The only one who remains unchanged by his creative work is God himself. And that's tremendously reassuring. There are a lot of changes that happen when you get married. There are a lot of changes that happen when you become a father. Sometimes it can be tempting to avoid those changes. It can be tempting to avoid them by keeping your current situation the same for as long as possible. And for some people that means birth control. They are looking to birth control to keep things the same in the midst of change. But God calls us to draw near to him instead. All those things that come to the surface? He knew about them all along. The only way we can ever work through that is by turning to him in faith every day.

CHANGE IS ESSENTIAL IF WE ARE TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD

When we avoid change, we avoid God. We avoid his creative work in our own lives. We avoid growth. Maybe that's fine by you. Maybe you're happy with where you're at right now. But you're missing out on some of the greatest blessings that God could give you. The blessing is that you come to recognize your deep need for God's work of renewal in your own life. But as you're humbled, you may also draw near to him. The blessing is that you recognize your need, and that God fulfills that need. You get a much deeper sense of who God is and who we are. When you postpone fatherhood, you postpone grace.

Not all of us are fathers. Some of us are single. Others perhaps cannot have children. That brings its own challenges. Maybe you're struggling with a tremendous sense of loss. But the basic message still applies to you. God still is at

work in your life. Yes, your circumstances are different. Your circumstances bring things to the surface in your life in ways that are perhaps different from those who are fathers. But the basic themes are exactly the same. The Lord uses our circumstances to bring these things to the surface so that we are humbled. And in our humility we turn to him. And then he shows himself to be a Father to us. He continues his creative work in our own lives.

When we draw near to God in humility, we become aware of him in a whole new way. We come to understand that he really does draw near to us. In Isaiah 57 God says, *"I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite"* (Isaiah 57:15 ESV). That's a wonderful promise. Don't reject it!

CONCLUSION

When you say that you want to get used to each other first, you're saying that you want to postpone humility. You want to postpone growth. You want to postpone drawing near. That's pride. We might not think of it right away, but that's what it is. It's pride. And pride is sin. Brothers, let's fight our sin together. Let's encourage each other to draw near to God in humility instead. He is always committed to us. He is always committed to his promises. He is a good father! Let's embrace the changes that God brings into our lives. Let's embrace the children that he gives. And when we do so, we are embraced by him.