

Godly home

Lesson: **Psalm 128**

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%20128;&version=31>

Last week, we started to get real, in the hope of getting Godly. We talked about how our real lives and our faith lives sometimes seem like two different lives.

Some folks want two different lives. Some folks want to live completely secular lives, divorced from the holy, and then have one or two top-of-the-mountain mystical experiences a year. I think of that as sort of a religious Spring Break — like going to a shamanic theme park, but without the kids.

But if you've come to know even a touch of the healing strength and peace that comes from a daily walk with the Lord, you start to want to be a 24/7 spiritual being. You want to live in God's presence all the time, receiving God's blessing and guidance all the time. And you want to see God working in the world, all the time.

We know we want one faith-filled, God-blessed, Jesus-led and Spirit-inspired, real, authentic, life. A Godly life. So during these weeks we're getting real, in the hope of getting Godly.

This week, being Father's Day and all, we're talking about home. What does "home" mean to you? Is it a specific house? A specific place? A specific group of people? Or is it a quality of being, a set of experiences and feelings?

John Henry Jowett has observed that "The Bible does not say very much about homes [*with the emphasis on the place*]; it says a great deal about the things that make them. It speaks about life and love and joy and peace and rest. If we get a house and put these into it, we shall have secured a home."¹

The Bible speaks about life and love and joy and peace and rest, as the quality of home. How do those sound, as what makes "home"? Any others?

Remember the story of the son who took his inheritance, left his father's house, squandered all he had on wine, women, and song, and came slinking back?² What did his father do? His father saw him coming from afar, ran outside to meet him, listened to his apology, and welcomed him home. And then he celebrated the kid's coming back from being lost. God the Father welcomes all us prodigal sons and daughters home, whenever we slink back and ask. So there's something of welcome and reconciliation in having a Godly home.

Our list of the Biblical qualities of home so far is life, love, joy, peace, rest, welcome, and reconciliation. Our scripture names another one of these qualities of a Godly home: The home of God is among mortals, dwelling with us, and our being God's people.³ Home is where God is present, living, and active. When God is among us, and we are with God, home is.

The Psalms, which are ancient hymns of praise and prayer, sing about the qualities of a Godly home. Psalm 138, which we read today, describes a Godly home this way: "You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands. You shall be happy, and it shall go well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine, your children will be like olive shoots around your table. You will see the prosperity of Jerusalem — of your

¹ In *What Is a Mother?* (Norwalk, Conn.: C.R. Gibson, 1977).

² Luke 15:11-32.

³ Revelation 21:3

holy places and your city. You will see your children's children, and your people will have peace." And the psalmist tells us that the way we gain home is by "fearing" God. "Fear", in our scriptures, means reverence and respect – awe mingled with hope.

So the qualities of a Godly home are a place where God lives among God's people, they live in reverence and respect of God. And what they get from this is life, love, joy, peace, rest, welcome, reconciliation and fruitfulness.

Home is where our Father will always welcome us and forgive us. In turn, home is where our love for that Father is filled with respect and reverence and hope. Our task, then, is to create a home in which God is allowed to live actively among us, and where God is the center of hope, reverence, and respect.

How do we do that? How do we create homes in which God dwells among the family, and where God is given hope-filled reverence and respect?

There are three parts to this, to creating Godly homes:

1. Consistently inviting God to dwell in your home.
2. Giving God your hope, reverence and respect.
3. Learning from the Father to run out, welcome, forgive, reconcile and celebrate with each other.

My friends, in those places where we are regularly welcomed and reconciled, where our joys are celebrated and our sorrows mourned, our love, respect, reverence, and hope grow.

Our heavenly Father, who is God, always welcomes and forgives us. But let's get real: lots of people have never experienced that kind of love, that kind of fatherliness in their own lives. You may be among them. You may know in your head that God your heavenly Father will forgive anything you have done. You may know that there is nothing you could have done, or that you could have been, that will cut you off from your Father's love. But maybe you didn't experience "home" growing up. Maybe you didn't know, through and through, that you were welcomed, loved, enjoyed, and at peace. If you didn't grow with it, you probably have trouble feeling it. You probably have trouble showing it.

We know from experience that we learn what we live. That's why it is so important for those of us who want to pass along a faith-filled, God-centered, Jesus-led and Spirit-inspired life to our children and our grandchildren and our neighbors and our guests live what it is we want to give them. And that's most important when it comes to faith. We have to teach "fear" of God, that is the respect, reverence, and hope in God, by living it. We have to live so that our children, grandchildren, neighbors and guests see our own respect, reverence, and hope.

Growing up, did you see your parents pray? Did you hear them speak respectfully of how they were leaning on God, or joyfully about how God was moving in their lives, or yours? We learn what we live.

We learn what we live – and here's the part you may not realize: it is said that our unreflective image of God directly correlates to our experience of our fathers. Some researchers have found that our core understanding of God – the one we initially bring with us into adulthood – directly correlates to our experience of our fathers.

§ If your father was patient and paid attention to you, you are more likely to see God as patient and available for you. You feel that you are worth God's time and concern. You feel important to God and that He (specifically God the Father) is personally involved in every aspect of your life.

§ If your father was kind and loving, you probably see God acting kindly and graciously on your behalf. You feel that you are worth God's help and intervention. You feel God's love for you deeply and you're convinced that He wants to relate to you personally.

§ If your father was giving, you may perceive God as someone who gives to you and supports you. You believe that God will give you what is best for you, and you respond by giving of yourself to others.

§ If your father accepted you, you tend to see God accepting you regardless of what you do. You feel God doesn't dump on you or reject you when you struggle, but understands and encourages you. You are able to accept yourself even when you blow it or don't perform up to your potential.

§ If your father protected you, you probably perceive God as your protector in life. You feel that you are worthy of being under His care and you rest in His security. ⁴

If you come into adulthood with a distorted image of God because of your experience of your own father, you may have a lot of work to do. As adults, we have to take responsibility for our perceptions and our feelings, and work to heal them where they are broken. And as adults, it is our task to share with our children, grandchildren, neighbors and friends the living, loving, joyful, creative, peaceful face of the real God.

I want to speak just to the fathers for a minute: you are critical in this. Just as your father shaped your relationship with God, so you will shape your children's relationship with God. You want your kids to know that God is loving and forgiving. You want them to know that a life lived with God has love, peace, joy, welcome, reconciliation, and fruitfulness. You need to accept that you are the primary provider of a Godly home, because if these researchers are right, they will learn their understanding of God from you.

If both parents worship regularly with their children, there's an 80% chance that the children will grow up to worship regularly. That's pretty good. If the children and their mother worship regularly, but you're not there, the probability of their worshipping God regularly as an adult drops to 30%. Now here's the amazing part, men: if the children and you worship regularly, even without their mother, the probability that they will grow up to respect, revere, and worship God is 70%.⁵ Fathers have an enormous effect on their children's faith. Never underestimate the power of a worshipping father.

Now fathers have gotten a bad rap throughout the ages, some of it deserved. Far too many men are fathers in biology only. Far too many have little or no relationship with their partners, or, for that matter, themselves. If you're the child of a physically or emotionally absent father, then that one is too many.

But the power of Godly fatherhood is tremendous, because fathers have the ability to shape their children's awareness and awe of God. Men: you have the power to help your children — and others' children — experience a loving, forgiving, welcoming God. Even if you never felt it yourself, you can help a child know God. You can create a Godly home for your children, and for other children through your church and through your care.

Women, you likely spend more time with your children — and with others' children — than men do. If you're a single parent, or if you're the only one in the house working at your faith life, you've got a lot on your plate. You cannot be both mother and father. But you can be you, and you can lean on God to provide what you need.

⁴ *Always Daddy's Girl*, H. Norman Wright (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001)

⁵ "On the Father Front", Christian Service Brigade, Spring, 1995, p. 4

Ask others to help you, including the men of this church. God will equip you and give you companions if you let God be God, and welcome them in.

So how can we create a Godly home, in our homes, in our church, and in our community? In other words, how do we live so as to model a faith-filled, God-centered, Jesus-lead, Spirit-inspired life? Not just for our own children, but for any child of God who wanders into our home?

- § Fear the Lord. The Bible says this about 130 times. It's probably a good idea.
- § Worship God, and let them see you do it. Prioritize it. And if you have grownup children or weekend guests who come to visit, let them know you worship on Sunday mornings, and they are welcome to come along.
- § Pray in front of your kids and with your kids. Bring them into your prayer life. Pray with them over their hard decisions. Pray with them before bed. Let them watch you pray, even when you stumble over your words, and maybe especially then.
- § When you read them bedtime stories, read them Bible stories. There are some great children's Bibles out there: my favorite book as a little kid was *The Golden Children's Bible*.
- § Forgive your kids (and your spouse) when they apologize, and listen to help them when they don't know how.
- § Celebrate when they are no longer lost.
- § Be attentive, and honest.
- § Honor their mother, or their father, even when you disagree with them.

What's a Godly home? A Godly home is where God lives among God's people, and they are alive, and loved, and secure. "Happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways for you will be blessed." You will be at home.

Let us pray:

Lord, come dwell among us, and be the center of our lives. We want 24/7 faith lives. We want real lives. We are ready to see you, to live in you, and to honor, respect and revere you as you deserve. Come make your home among us, and make our homes places of active faith, life, love, joy, peace, rest, fruitfulness, welcome, and reconciliation – not just for our own families, but for our neighbors, friends, and strangers. Make our homes worthy of your making home with us. We ask this in Jesus's name. *Amen.*