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Who is Your Most Admired Man (or Who Should He Be)?

By Tal Davis

11 And He (Jesus) said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that is coming to me.' And so he divided his wealth between them. 13 And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey to a distant country, and there he squandered his estate in wild living. 14 Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began doing without. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he longed to have his fill of the carob pods that the pigs were eating, and no one was giving him anything. 17 But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired laborers have more than enough bread, but I am dying here from hunger! 18 I will set out and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired laborers.'" 20 So he set out and came to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and]put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, slaughter it, and let's eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate." (Luke 15:11- 24 NASB)

Nearly every year since 1946, The Gallup organization has issued the results of its most admired man of the year poll. In 2020 it was Donald Trump. For some reason no poll was taken in 2021 or 2022. Who is your most admired man? When I was a boy it was naturally sports stars like Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris, Bart Starr, and Johnny Unitas. My favorite was Fred Biletnikoff, Florida State University's first consensus All American football player.

As a teenager I admired cool actors like Sean Connery, Paul Newman, Steve McQueen, Clint Eastwood, and Burt Reynolds (I liked him because he was also an FSU player). Later, when I grew up, I realized what men were really worthy of admiration. Those were men like Dwight D. Eisenhower, Audie Murphy, Ronald Reagan, Martin Luther King, Jr., Billy Graham, and George H. W. Bush.

Actually one man truly stands out for me: my father: Joseph A. Davis (1910-1981). Now he never did anything that most of us would think was great (though he was an army officer during World War II). What he did do, however, was love my mother, my sister, and me. He took me to ball games, came to all my games, took us to the beach, took me to church every week, and taught me right from wrong.

Obviously, based on a biblical worldview perspective, our fathers should be our most admired person. Unfortunately, not everyone has a father they can admire. Some had good fathers who died when they were very young. Others had fathers who were abusive, addicted to alcohol or drugs, went to prison, or abandoned their families. Without a doubt, the greatest social crisis of America today is the absence of

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good fathers in the lives of so many children.

So, we might ask, what makes a father worth admiring? If you are a father (or will be) this really matters. So, with Father's Day coming up, let's examine three factors that make a father worth admiring. We will use the example of the father in Jesus' parable above to examine these principles (see above: Luke 15:11-24). We call this story the "Parable of the Prodigal Son." I prefer to call it the "Parable of the Most Admired Father."

The first principle is that a father worth admiring cares for his family.

The unnamed father in Jesus' parable evidently cared for his sons. He was willing to give them what they wanted. So, when his younger son came to him demanding his share of his father's estate, the father consented. Now, we may wonder why he didn't just say "No!" to the younger boy?

To answer that question, we must not forget this story is a parable, and that Jesus intended for the father to represent God. Yes, God loves us, but He allows us make choices. We can choose to follow Him or go our own way. He will not prevent it. He will allow us to do what we want and to face the consequences of our actions. However, if we do follow God, He will give generously to us.

As human fathers, we must love our families and children. Nonetheless, we must guide our families with a strong hand. Sometimes, however, our children have to learn the hard way.

The second principle is that a father worth admiring should have a life strategy for his family.

In Jesus' story, the father allowed his young son to leave home. Keep in mind that in that ancient culture there was no "adolescence" as we now know it. Children went straight from childhood to adulthood. The father had developed a strategy to help his sons grow up to be productive men. The younger boy tried to circumvent his father's plans, but the father knew best.

Like the father, God sees the long term effects of life. He knows what will happen and wants us to follow His directions. He has a strategy for each of us providing we will follow His precepts in His Word. Otherwise, we will suffer the consequences of our disobedience.

That is why a good father should have a strategy for his family. Before any military commander goes into a war he must see the big picture. He must develop a long term strategy, then adopt short-term battle tactics to accomplish the greater goals. A family should also have a long-term strategy developed by a father and mother. But, in war, plans rarely go exactly as schemed. The same is true in families. Fathers and mothers must be flexible in order to adjust to changing circumstances. Their guiding principles and goals must remain solid, but they must be able to adjust to changing life situations.

Likewise, they should be balanced in the discipline of their children. As Paul instructed: *Fathers, do not provoke (exasperate) your children to anger, but bring them up (nourish them) in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* (Ephesians 6:4 NASB)

The writer of Hebrews says this concerning discipline: *7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had*

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earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 For the moment, all discipline seems not to be pleasant, but painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (Hebrews 12:7-11 NASB)

The third factor is that a father worth admiring must trust in the power of genuine love.

When his son left, the father in the parable did not know if he would ever see him again. Yet he trusted God and believed the love he had shown the son would someday bring him back.

Real love has real power. It can change lives. There is no guarantee that it will, but we must never give up loving. Love can sometimes be very painful. An old saying goes, "There is no greater pain than for a father whose son gone bad."

This is the kind love God has for us. It is redemptive love that never gives up. God waits for us to return just as the father in the story waited in anguish for his son. When the boy came back, having squandered his inheritance, the father ran to him and welcomed him home. That's how God receives us when we turn to Him in repentance and faith in Christ.

The father was the focus of Jesus' parable, not the son. From it we learned three lessons: a father must care for family; a father should have

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strategy for his family but be able to improvise in the face of unexpected events; and a father must trust in God and in the power of love.

These make for a father worth admiring. Who is your most admired man? Will you be your kids' most admired man?

Happy Father's Day!