

September 2nd 2012: A Text For Fathers : Proverbs 3:1-17

That particular passage is I feel, a very relevant one to read on this Fathers Day, for I'm sure that we men especially need to hear about 'trusting the Lord with all our hearts and leaning not upon our own understanding.'

However that verse is not my text this morning.— Proverbs 3:3 is:-

***Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.***

It was the mention of 'binding them around your neck' that first caught my attention and made me think of 'cable ties'.

Now I'm a great believer in cable ties and find them a really useful invention. I do get a little frustrated when I try to re-open them because they are made to stay closed in order to keep the two things attached, and of course that is their great feature. Whether you are attaching an electric cable to a frame to keep it in a safe place, or a piece of wire fencing to a post, you can guarantee that it will stay there.

In fact Cable ties are useful for many purposes. I read that some people use them to keep hub caps on cars, tie up tomato bushes, and even in craft products with one lady using the colourful ones to weave baskets. However, to use a cable tie to bind something around your neck would not be the best option I'm sure. And yet it would be a good way of keeping an important instruction in a place where you would often see it, and therefore remember to do something about it.

And what our text gives us men this morning is a very important instruction for us to follow if we want to bless our families. It says 'Let love and Faithfulness never leave you'. Let them constantly be expressed through your life and noticed by those who come into contact with you. Especially by those that you want to inspire and influence in the way of Christ.

Of course in the days when these Proverbs were written the practice of men wearing ornaments around their necks was well spread. Religious types would wear religious symbols to show their beliefs or to encourage them in their faith. Others would wear expensive chains and precious stones to show

their wealth. Some would even have a prophecy or commandment inscribed upon a tablet that would hang within their garments next to their heart.

So the men and women listening to this proverb would have registered instantly that he was suggesting that instead of the outward wearing of such things in order to look wealthy or righteous, they should spiritually wear around their neck and have inscribed on their hearts the God-honouring characteristics of LOVE & FAITHFULNESS.

The same is just as true for us today and especially for the Dads, Grandads, Great Grandads, and the potential dads amongst us. We have this responsibility of revealing these same two virtues to those the Lord has put into our care. And that's where cable ties fit in, for as an ongoing reminder of that responsibility I have given you a cable tie with Proverbs 3:3 attached to it.

Hang it somewhere where you will see it every day. Not around your neck, or your wife's neck, but maybe on the gear stick, or some other place in the car. Hang it on the toilet door, in the garage, on the fridge. Let it be a reminder to you of the need to show love and faithfulness to those you care about most. For these two virtues have the potential to change young lives.

The word Love as used here is the Hebrew word HESED which is mainly used of God's covenantal love for His people in the OT. It is often translated mercy, because God's love to Israel was shown most in His mercy towards them. He was kind to them when they didn't deserve it. He raised up deliverer after deliverer for them when their own stupidity had put them into a catastrophic mess. Even His discipline was aimed at bringing them to that place where He could restore them once more as His people. His love was practical, enduring, and enabling.

As a father, potential father, grandfather or Uncle, God wants you to love like that. To show mercy even when you know that it's not deserved. To work harder at keeping the relationship alive and strong than the recipient of your love does, for that is the meaning of HESED.

& when it's so easy to neglect the child now grown into an adult because they have moved away from you, instead, reach out in some way towards them first, for that is how God showed Hesed to His people.

When I think of this love I think of the father of the prodigal son who, at the first sign of this returning lad who had misused him and hurt him so much, ran to meet him; allowed him to speak no words of remorse but hugged him, before wrapping him in a clean robe, putting new sandals on his feet and a ring on his finger. And then later he goes out from the party to where his other son is having a jealous hissy fit, and seeks to talk him back into the warmth of the family. That's the type of love God wants you to hang around your neck and carve into your heart.

But as well as love there is also FAITHFULNESS. Faithfulness which is yet another Hebrew word that is mainly connected in the OT with God, and His relationship with His people. Indeed God's faithfulness to His people when they forsook Him and followed after idols is a "stand—out" characteristic of Jaweh. He remained faithful towards them despite their unfaithfulness towards Him.

This word Faithfulness also means reliability, trustworthiness, and truth.

Before our families we need to be seen as Faithful to God and His Word. Faithful to the promises we have made to Him. Others may only see us on a Sunday at church but our families see us all the time, and they are the first to pick up on any hypocrisy in us.

We are required to be faithful in our relationships with our wives and our children by first giving to them the support, respect, love and encouragement we expect back, and continue to do so even if we receive little in return.

Faithfulness was one thing that I will always remember my Dad for. He and Mum were always faithful to each other, even when they didn't always agree. He was faithful to me in his role as a dad and to my kids as a granddad. Especially he was faithful to what he believed, and I know that one of the reasons that I am who I am today is because of the faithfulness that shone out of Him.

You may not have been blessed with that standard of faithfulness, and therefore you may well have a stronger compulsion to be extra faithful in your dealings with your children and grandchildren—I really hope so.

I recall a very sad conversation I had once with the adult son of a well known Missionary who had given his whole life to serving the Lord mainly in

outback Australia. He had been faithful in his ministry but had failed to show the same faithfulness before God in his role as a husband and father. Mainly because of that unfaithfulness none of his children were at all interested in Christian things.

There is a balance between Christian ministry and family responsibility that must be pursued, and we all know that there is no guarantee of our children following Christ even when the balance is right. But the odds swing God's way when our children see that we are faithful in our ministry outside the family and also within the family as fathers, grandfathers and so on.

The major thing to note from our text however, is that such Love and Faithfulness is real because it emerges from our hearts. They are not goals we follow or tasks we pursue because we have to. They are heart motivated.

Paul says something similar in 2 Corinthians 3:3

³ You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

So the question is, how do we make this love and faithfulness become a heart generated action and the answer is with prayer. We need to pray for those that the Lord has given us as our close family. They may be our children or grandchildren; our siblings or their children; our wives or maybe our parents. We should be praying that the Lord will use our Hesed and our faithfulness to so bless them, that their lives will be enriched and their spirits either drawn to, or made stronger in Christ.

That's why you will find on the back of your text this morning a prayer that I would encourage you to pray after you have prayed for those family the Lord has entrusted into your special care. It simply says:- LORD, IN SOME WAY MAKE ME PART OF THE ANSWER.

In preparing for this Fathers Day address this week I could not fail to note the text that The Word For Today presented last Tuesday. Taken from Ezekiel 22:30 it is the Lord saying, "I sought for a man who would stand in the gap"..... By living out love, faithfulness and praying for our families we surely become men who stand in the gap for our Lord.