

“Not Many Fathers”  
by Wendell Smith

When my wife Gini and I got married, we spent part of our honeymoon in Portland at the Holiness Campground where Pastor Dick Iverson and Bible Temple were having their Family Camp the first week of September 1972. We had discovered the church earlier that spring on a trip to The Rose City and decided to relocate there and start our marriage together attending this dynamic, growing church we had found.

We were attracted to the spiritual worship, to the prophetic atmosphere and Word based teaching and preaching and most importantly to the Pastor. Brother Dick, as most of us came to call him, was a very sincere, genuine man who was amazingly transparent. He was the same in or out of the pulpit. For us, as a young couple who had been birthed into the things of the Spirit at the time of the Jesus People movement, this kind of straightforwardness was something we sincerely admired. It attracted us to this dynamic young church and we were soon deeply involved.

Gini was not particularly close to her father, and my father died of cancer later that same year. Dick Iverson became to us a surrogate father, both spiritually and naturally. We were a young couple in our early twenties, just starting out in life and Dick was in the prime of his ministry, in his forties, just catching the momentum that would propel Bible Temple into the great church it has become today (City Bible Church). Brother Dick and Sister Edie Iverson took us under their wings and tutored, trained and trusted us for over twenty years. That relationship dramatically imprinted our lives and destiny.

Years later, we pioneered our church in the Seattle area, being sent out under Pastor Iverson’s care and oversight. Our relationship actually deepened and blossomed after that, much in the same way an adult child’s relationship to his parents does after leaving home to start his own family. Dick became even more of a spiritual father figure and played a significant role in helping us grow our new church. Every year he has spoken into the life of our congregation and helped us immensely. When he steps up into our pulpit with his gray crown of wisdom, it is like having “Grandpa” come to visit and it always seems to bring a sense of security to our flock as he nurtures and feeds our people, now one generation removed from his own ministry.

**Relationships Are Key**

The Kingdom of God is based on relationships. It does not operate on the basis of organization or denomination or affiliation. It operates through God ordained relationships that are cultivated in the reality of life and ministry. God draws people together. The Lord sets the solitary in families. The Father sets the members in the Body as it pleases Him. And divine connections that happen between people are orchestrated of God to provide in our lives the kind of love and correction that we need to become all that He has planned.

The most rewarding and encouraging of these relationships in the Kingdom of God is that of spiritual fathers. The apostle Paul said it this way,

*“Though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” 1 Cor 4:15 (NKJV)*

### **Not Many Fathers**

We do not have many fathers. The relationships are more rare than a visiting evangelist or a traveling teacher. Here is someone who is in our lives to stay. They are committed to the long haul. They are family.

There are many good communicators and speakers we have had over the years in our church, but there are not many spiritual mentors and father figures. If you are privileged to have such a relationship, it is both precious and meaningful.

Fathers in the faith are those who birth, lead or mentor us in the Gospel. They may be pastors, teachers, apostolic leaders or a minister of some kind but they should always be mature, seasoned and firmly established in truth and a lifestyle of genuine faith.

### **Honoring Our Fathers**

It is imperative for us to recognize their God given place in our lives and then honor them for it. We are living in days where the Bible predicts that lawlessness will abound (Matt. 24:12). That spirit of independence will cause the love of many to grow cold. We see it all around us. It is disrespect for those in authority. It raises its head against parents, teachers, pastors and even government leaders. It brings with it a spirit of suspicion and mistrust and unbelief.

Many people won't want trust anyone, lest they be hurt or disillusioned or abused. There is always a risk in loving someone, but the advantages of fatherhood out weigh the risks. God wants to give each of us spiritual fathers who love us and in whom we can put our trust and reciprocal love.

There were spiritual fathers in the days of the early church. Paul was a father to his son in the faith Timothy (see 1 Tim. 1:2). The apostle James seemed to be the father of the Church in Jerusalem as he led that church through the major transitions of its early history. Just as there were fathers in that first generation of the church's journey, so there are fathers among us in the modern church. God is faithful and this principle of spiritual fatherhood is still at work and still available to us as believers today.

### **Warts and All**

Natural fathers have weaknesses, and yet they are still our fathers. Some misguided believers move from church to church and ministry to ministry because they refuse to allow themselves to trust men who may have weaknesses. Even in their desperate search they will never find a church where those weaknesses do not exist.

Born to a certain family, you cannot change your parents DNA. You had no choice in the matter. God in His sovereignty chose them for you. My father is my father even with his quirks and faults. When I need a father, I can't buy one. There is no patriarchal supermarket. I have only the option of going to the one God ordained for me.

Before I frivolously destroy a relationship with a father or mother in the Lord, I need to consider carefully what wonderful benefits can come to my life by allowing them to speak into my life and influence me for righteousness. Fathers, even in their weakness, can still be used of God to give us wisdom and help us in our spiritual growth.

### **A Father's Ministry**

According to the scriptures, spiritual fathers exhort, comfort, and charge us with the principles of God's word. They are faithful to tell us the truth even when we might not like it.

*"You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."*  
1 Thess. 2:10-12 (NKJV)

One of the characteristics of a true father is their willingness exhort us to do what is right, even at the risk of injuring the relationship. They remind us of principles that can help guide our lives and will keep us on track. Every one of us needs someone who challenges our thinking if we start going off course. This is what the Bible means when it says they "exhort" us.

Another characteristic is the comfort they provide in the struggles of life. We have all been there. We have walked through the valley of the shadow and faced life-threatening struggles, fighting with an enemy that seemed to outmatch us. A true father will be there to hold our hand, put an arm around our shoulder or even weep with us in difficult times. The Lord Himself said He would be our shepherd and "comfort" us (Ps. 23: 4). We all need the comfort of a father or a mother at our side during tough times.

A father also charges us. This characteristic is wonderfully expressed through the Greek language. It means to bear witness that something is true or genuine. It also means to affirm and give a good report. A spiritual father bears witness that we are the real thing. He affirms us and confirms to us that we are going to make it. In the process he reminds us of our mission, our appointment and the gifts that are within us (see 2 Tim. 1:6)

At times, I have felt I was drifting in my ministry, confused and unclear of what I should be doing or where I was headed. Speaking to my Pastor, he would simply remind me, charge me, and stir me up to recall the unmistakable call of God upon my life. He would jog my memory and recall the times when I had clearly articulated my purpose and he would help me find my way back to that focus. He bore witness to the fact that he agreed with that call and purpose. Like a natural father saying, "Son, you are a Smith, and this is what a Smith does..." or "You can do it. I know you can. I believe in you. You've enable to do this in the past and I know you can do it again."

**Seeking Right Relationships**

In a day when relationships at all levels are being challenged, stretched and broken, we need to pursue and protect those relationships that the Lord has given to us with spiritual fathers. We should seek out and mend, if necessary, any relationship that has this precious potential of helping to build and better our lives and future.

We must honor our fathers and mothers in the Lord (Eph. 6:2,3). We can do so in many ways. But the best and most forthright manner of honoring spiritual fathers is to acknowledge them, respect them, give them a place of influence in our lives and listen when they speak. If we honor them, we will surely receive the promise. Things will be well with us and we will live a long and fruitful life!