

The Cry for Spiritual Moms and Dads *by Dave Minor*

Across the Body of Christ there is a growing awareness and interest in the subject of spiritual fathering and mothering. As a result much attention is being given to the ministry of apostles and how they relate to this subject.

Unfortunately, in this time when people are crying out for a true expression of God's father's heart, there are those who are taking advantage of people's hunger and appointing themselves as apostles. Many of these people are not true apostles by God's definition. Because there has been so little understanding on this subject many churches and individuals are being misled and the work of God in certain places is being hurt.

In spite of this, however, the Bible does teach that throughout the church age there will be true apostles. These apostles are given to the church to bless the church and help the church and the individual members of the church to be built up and equipped to fulfill their purpose and destiny. For this to happen, we must recognize fathering or mentoring ministries and see their importance in the Body of Christ.

Apostolic ministry involves many things, but one of the most important things that will always serve as a basis for this ministry is spiritual fathering. The Bible indicates that all those who have forsaken fathers and mothers for the sake of the Gospel will receive fathers and mothers to take their place (Mark 10:29-30).

When we become Christians we become identified with a spiritual family. That family is composed of brothers and sisters, but it is also a place where we can find fathers and mothers. Fathers and mothers are those who have been Christians for a long time, who have lived a life of obedience and have experienced the rewards of a life of faithful service to the Lord.

These are people that God has placed in the family of God and one of the responsibilities of these elder and more mature ones in the body is to be available and to teach the younger or the more immature (Titus 2). They are given as resources to the younger.

Just as with all ministries there are levels of expression in the Body of Christ, so it is with this ministry of fathering. Apostolic ministry should be a seasoned expression of this ministry that reaches beyond fathering other believers. Apostolic fathers should have the ability to father believers, ministries, other apostolic ministries and even local churches.

The role of apostolic fathering is a biblical concept. In I Corinthians 4:15 Paul writes to the church as a whole and says "For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel".

Regardless of the level of calling, there is a need in all of us for fathering or mentoring. New converts need mentoring, young Christians need mentoring, older Christians need mentoring and even pastors of churches need mentoring. We are all

growing in our relationship to the Lord. We are all on the path of the just that goes from glory to glory. We can all learn from those who have gone before.

As a result there is a need for many fathers and mothers in God's spiritual family. If you are older in the Lord than someone else, you should be reaching down to those newer ones in the faith. As you are faithful in those relationships, God will continually expand your realm of influence in people's lives.

In the same way pastors and local congregations need fathering and mentoring. Many of the pastors that are leading churches have been saved out of homes where they never experienced any fathering of their own. They became saved, then God called them to ministry and they began the role of a pastor not knowing how to father themselves.

Along with that we have scores of people in local churches that have also never experienced fathering. I believe that God places apostolic fathers in the lives of pastors and churches to represent the heart of our Heavenly Father. They are placed in their lives to provide an example to the church and its leaders as Paul said, "I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me" (I Cor. 11:1).

Regardless of the level of expression of fathering, there are certain characteristics that all spiritual fathers and mothers should possess. This is how we identify them in our lives. So what are the characteristics of spiritual fathers?

Spiritual Reproduction

The first characteristic of a fathering ministry is reproduction. A fathering ministry reproduces himself in those he fathers. For instance an apostle ministers as a spiritual father to a pastor or leader who in turn picks up that father heart and begins to transmit that same heart to the members of the congregation.

My observation over the years is simply that many people could lead if someone would show them how to lead, to allow themselves to be led, and to gain the confidence that they can be effective as they draw from that father's heart.

Servanthood

Another characteristic of an apostolic father is one of servanthood. Matthew 23:11 states "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant." One of the marks of a true servant is that a servant never has a personal agenda. Their only desire is to help and serve others to make them whole and successful.

Today the church is experiencing a resurgence of so called apostolic ministries. Unfortunately, many are doing this because they desire authority, personal gain or promotion. Not so with a true apostolic father. A true apostolic father's joy and delight is to see the health and well being of those who are spiritual sons and daughters.

Covenantal Longevity

Another characteristic of a true fathering ministry is what I call "covenantal longevity". True fathering relationship cannot be short term. Just like the natural relationships in the family, they are long term. The covenantal aspect of the relationship takes you through good times and bad times. It reflects the heart of Jesus who said, "I

will never leave you or forsake you!” It reflects the heart of the father demonstrated in the story of the prodigal son. In spite of the son’s walking away from the father’s house, the father continually looked for his return.

Authority Based on Relationship

Spiritual fathers have a limited authority in the lives of those to whom they minister. Their authority is based on relationship and is limited by the degree to which it is desired and received.

As a father and a grandfather, I know a little about working with adult children. When my children became adult, married and moved away from home they became the heads of their own homes. Now the only authority that I have with my earthly children is the authority that they give me to speak into certain situations.

The same is true as a spiritual father. From time to time I am called to deal with a serious church situation or I must address a matter with a spiritual son or daughter. Sometimes I am there to advise and to guide. Other times they may say, “We are giving you the authority to deal with this situation as you see fit.” In either case, the only authority that I have or want to have is that which they choose to give to me.

Relationship/Communication

The last characteristic that I would like to mention has to do with interpersonal relationships. You cannot be a spiritual parent if you never see or talk to the people that you are parenting. Unless you stay close to them in relationship, unless you know what is going on in their lives you cannot be an effective spiritual father or mother. This is one of the important facets of apostolic ministry. Herein lies a great source of help for those who reach out for it. When you make time for this relationship to happen parenting can occur very naturally.

We are living in a day when God wants more and more people to be involved in becoming spiritual moms and dads in the Body of Christ. As members one of another we have the responsibility of being our brother’s keepers. May God put His father’s heart within us so that we can be faithful to those that He has put in our path.