

In the sleepy town of Bethel, Connecticut a boy was born in 1810. His parents christened him Phineas Taylor. He would end up making quite an impact upon our nation all because of a practical joke that his grandfather and father played on him.

When he was old enough to talk and reason, his grandfather presented Phineas with the deed to a sizeable parcel of land - a place that he called *Ivy Island*. His grandfather went on to tell Phineas how privileged he was to be the owner of such valuable property at such a young age. Young Phineas was the richest boy in town, his grandpa would often say. For he was the owner of every square foot of Ivy Island, the most valuable land in all of Connecticut.

Phineas' father confirmed Grandpa's message often reminding Phineas of his good fortune owning such a valuable property. His dad begged Phineas not to forget the rest of the family when he came of age. Phineas assured him that he wouldn't.

This deed that had been bequeathed to Phineas had a dramatic impact on his childhood. While other children were playing with dolls or pretending to be cowboys and Indians, Phineas would daydream about his inheritance. He would dream of being the lord of Ivy Island. He envisioned a magnificent dwelling overlooking fields of waving grain dissected by rippling streams. As he grew older, Phineas began to beg his grandfather and father to take him to see this place of his dreams called Ivy Island.

Finally, when he was 10 years old, his grandpa and father gave in to his endless pleas. Next week, they would take him on a trip to see his priceless inheritance. Phineas could hardly sleep all week. Just think. Next week he would see the land of his dreams, Ivy Island.

True to their promise, his grandfather and father took young Phineas on the long-awaited journey to the young man's Promised Land. As they drove the wagon up and over each hill, Phineas would ask, *are we almost there?* Finally, his father pointed north to the end of a long meadow and said, *just beyond that stately row of trees is your property.*

Phineas strained to catch a vision of his land as they lumbered down the road, but the tree line blocked his vision. Finally, they reached the end of the road where Phineas could see his inheritance clearly. The stunned 10 year old looked out at several acres of worthless swamp. His grandfather and father could contain themselves no longer. They began to snicker and then to laugh right out loud as Phineas walked to the edge of the snake-infested swampland with tears in his eyes.

On the long trip back home, the truth began to dawn on young Phineas Taylor. For years now he had been the laughingstock of the entire family. Every time he had asked about his valuable inheritance, the other members of the family had suppressed grins.

That humiliating practical joke that brought such childhood disillusionment to young Phineas Taylor would eventually have a dramatic influence in shaping his life. Having been fooled by his own grandfather and father, he would now dedicate himself to proving that the world was full of fools. The motto that he made up and often quoted was *a sucker is born every minute*. And Phineas would spend his entire life trying to prove it. For Phineas Taylor Barnum would become one of our nation's most famous con artists. P.T. Barnum would advertise the Greatest Show on Earth. It would certainly include some spectacular entertainment. But surrounding the entertainment would be trick games and fake oddities designed to trick people and milk them of their money.

The young boy whose dreams had rested in a worthless swamp became a master at flashing temporary dreams before the eyes of others and then snatching them away. He continually said that there is a sucker born every minute and spent his life trying to prove it. On his deathbed, P.T. Barnum's last words were, *how much were the gate receipts today?*

It is impossible to calculate the influence that a father and grandfather can have on their children and grandchildren. That is one of the reasons for the importance of this day that we call Father's Day. Certainly, it is right and proper to honor fathers for their position in the family and commitment to the family. But it is also necessary to periodically remind ourselves of the strategic influence that fathers have in their families either for good or for ill.

As we consider the influence that a father has in his family, we want to look at the example of one of the most famous fathers in the bible this morning. His name was David. He certainly must be considered to be one of the most successful people in the entire bible. David became the king of a nation that was in shambles. It was a job that nobody in his right mind would even want. It was a figurehead position at best; and a downright dangerous position at worst. The Philistines were the rulers over the Israelites and had been for more than a generation. They had pretty much had their way all the time that Saul was king right up to the day when they killed Saul and his sons in battle, and they weren't about to change things now. So it was not surprising that the Philistine army gathered to pay David a visit right after he was anointed the new king of Israel. They wanted to let David know who was boss right from the start.

Imagine their surprise when this young upstart led a small, motley band of courageous men to victory in his first official confrontation with the mighty Philistines. This must have been a fluke, the Philistines thought as they regathered their forces. But once again, David routed them so badly that they were forced to flee their camp, leaving all of their possessions and even their idols behind. In 2 quick battles, David had accomplished what Saul was unable to do in a lifetime.

Nor did David stop with squirming out from under the thumb of the Philistines. No, systematically he began to subdue all of the surrounding nations until the nation of Israel was the new power to be reckoned with. The Edomites, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Syrians, they all fell like dominoes before the military machine that

David had built. He didn't lose one war - in fact, it isn't even recorded in the Bible that he ever lost one battle. Yes, all would have to admit David to be a remarkable success as a king and commander-in-chief.

But while David's career as King was blossoming, he wasn't having as much success as a father. Perhaps the busyness of his kingly duties prohibited him from spending the time with his children that he should have. Certainly the culturally accepted practice of polygamy caused jealousies and rivalries within his family. Perhaps David was such a successful man in his military exploits that he had trouble accepting and admitting defeat in his family failures. But whatever the reasons, David was not as successful a father as he was a general. Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah all testify to his failures at home. So we are not going to lift up David as the model dad for all to follow this morning.

But with all of his failures and weaknesses, David had a remarkable success as a father as well. For David had a life changing impact on the son whose name was Solomon. And this influence would continue to make an impact upon the nation of Israel long after David had left this earth. I want to focus on the success that David had with his son Solomon, especially evident in the beginning of Solomon's reign as king, as we consider the influence that father's have on their children this morning. We have been looking at values that we should highly treasure during these past Sunday mornings. This morning, we conclude this series by looking at the priceless treasure of wisdom that we each should value in our lives.

In the Scripture reading that we read earlier from Proverbs 4, Solomon testified of his father's impact on the priorities of his life. Solomon wrote, *When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, he taught me and said, Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live. Get wisdom, get understanding, do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore, get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Prov. 4:3-7*

Now in some ways this seems unlikely advice from a king to his son. With David's becoming king of an anemic nation that had been under the thumb of a foreign power for more than a generation, and with his natural military genius, we might have guessed that he would have set military supremacy as the top priority for his son. After all, in these days as today, the strongest nation prospered and its king was respected above others. Having come from a poor background and having ascended to the pinnacle of glory, we might have guessed that David would have set fame and prosperity as the top priority for his son. After all, who wouldn't want all the luxury and prosperity that the world could offer? Having known from the inside how tenuous the position of being king could be both from dissident usurpers to the throne and even from unhappy family members, we might have guessed that David might advise Solomon to secure power for himself. A strong power base is the key to maintaining a secure and stable kingship. After all, what king would want to rule having always to look over his shoulder in fear? Yes, we could understand if David would have advised his son to have military prowess or fame or wealth or power as his top priority. But wisdom? Understanding? In some ways, this seems to be strange advice indeed.

But I want you to see the influence that David's advice had on his son, especially during those early days of his reign when he was insecure and unsure of himself.

TURN TO AND READ 1 KINGS 3:5-14

<sup>5</sup> At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

<sup>1KI 3:6</sup> Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

<sup>1KI 3:7</sup> "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. <sup>8</sup> Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. <sup>9</sup> So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

<sup>1KI 3:10</sup> The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. <sup>11</sup> So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, <sup>12</sup> I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. <sup>13</sup> Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for--both riches and honor--so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. <sup>14</sup> And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life."

Early in his reign, Solomon experienced the dream of almost every person on this earth. Since the beginning of time, people have dreamed of having any wish granted. Legends have been formed of a genie in a lamp granting any wish imaginable.

Well, Solomon was the only person that we know of who actually had this type of dream come true. The Lord himself appeared to Solomon and offered to grant any wish that he wanted. If God appeared to you in such a dream, what would you wish for? The pressure is on - you have only one wish, and you must make it now.

Solomon wished for wisdom, for understanding. Exactly what his father, David had advised him to have as his top priority in life. Isn't that interesting? Even though he was now dead, David's influence continued in his son, Solomon. Now I want to make 3 observations concerning the influence that a father can have on his son as we consider this strategic choice that Solomon made here that would give direction to his entire reign as king.

#### 1. A FATHER CAN HAVE GREAT INFLUENCE ON KEY DECISIONS THAT A CHILD WILL MAKE -

Too many fathers take their position in the family too lightly. Especially in this day, when parental authority is being undermined at every turn, fathers can have a tendency to assume too little about their potential influence in the family. But God has created the family structure to guide children into the next generation. Fathers have an integral role in this direction for the entire family. A father who accepts his God-given position and uses this position wisely can have a tremendous influence on his children.

David set the ideal of wisdom and the pursuit of understanding as a priority in Solomon's head when he was

just a small child. It was a good path for Solomon to take in life. And when Solomon grew up to be a man, and when he had the opportunity to make a priority choice for himself, he chose wisdom just as he father had encouraged and influenced him to do.

There was a written testimony in the Sunday School Guide many years ago. A Christian leader was reminiscing about his childhood, growing up on a farm. He told specifically of one year when the family was anticipating a bumper crop of grain. The fields were a sea of golden heads of waving grain. It was just a week before harvest time and the various members of the family were already discussing how the money of the abundant crop should be spent. But then 2 days before the harvest was scheduled, the skies darkened suddenly. An unseasonable storm which sent golf-ball sized hailstones pelted the ground and totally destroyed the crop. The next morning, this young lad walked out with his father to survey the damage to the fields. As they looked over the acres of crushed grain, the lad expected his father to be in despair. But instead, he heard his father begin to sing softly, *Rock of Ages, cleft for me; let me hide myself in thee*. Now later in his life as a Christian leader, this man would look back and testify that moment to be the time when he heard the greatest sermon that he ever heard preached. It was his father's faith which stood strong in adversity which influenced him to not only trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, but to also commit his life to the Lord in faithful service.

Fathers must never underestimate the influence that they have in their families. In the routine of daily life, during the happy times of celebration and during the hours of deepest despair, fathers can influence the direction of their children's lives and key decisions that will be made by their children in the future.

2. But notice now a second observation with me from this scene in Solomon's life. **EVEN THOUGH A FATHER MIGHT MAKE MANY MISTAKES, HE STILL CAN HAVE A POWERFUL POSITIVE INFLUENCE-**

As we have mentioned earlier, David was not a model father all of his life. He had made many grievous mistakes in raising and disciplining his children. The natural temptation that a man has when he has failed is to quit, to give up, to feel that the situation is hopeless. But the human mind is an amazing thing. And the resiliency that a child has is also amazing. As a child grows, he or she can discern and gain from positive examples in life. If a father is willing to admit his mistakes and failures, a child is usually willing to forgive and accept the positive that is offered.

There is one characteristic that runs like a thread through the lives of all successful people. Successful people come in all shapes and sizes; they all have differing levels of abilities; they all have differing backgrounds and training. But successful people all have the tenacity to not accept failure as the final word on their lives and work. In 1894 a teacher of rhetoric in Harrow, England wrote on a 16 year olds report card - *a conspicuous lack of potential for success*. We are happy today that Winston Churchill refused to accept this comment as the defining statement of his life. In 1902 the poetry editor of Atlantic Monthly rejected a manuscript of poetry scribbling in the margins, *our magazine has no room for your verse*. We are happy today that Robert Frost refused to accept this rejection as the

final word on his writing abilities. In 1905, the University of Bern turned down a PhD dissertation as being *irrelevant and fanciful*. We are happy today that Albert Einstein did not accept this rejection and continued his study in physics.

If perseverance is so critical in career success, how much more important is it in molding the lives of the eternal souls that God has entrusted to us. Don Shula is remembered as one of the most successful football coaches of all time. His favorite saying is: *Success is not forever, and failure is not fatal*. That is a good motto for parenting. Yes, successes come in parenting, but they are certainly not forever. They usually are just for a moment's flash in time. But failure is also not fatal. Mistakes can be corrected. And positive influence can come through even when there are mistakes that have been made.

3. But we must conclude this morning with a final observation. IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO BEGIN TO INFLUENCE AS A FATHER-

Too often we forget the historical context when studying the Scriptures. We must remember that David did not commit the sin of adultery with Bathsheba until later in his life. He was at the pinnacle of power when he first met Bathsheba. The major military battles of his life had already been fought and won. He had already built his glorious empire. He already had many other wives and even more children. Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah were all young men by now - and as we have already seen, David had not done a very good job fathering them. He basically had a rebellious, undisciplined household. And now, late in his middle age, he meets Bathsheba and commits the sin of adultery with her. David has her husband murdered in a futile attempt to cover his tracks. The child born out of their immorality dies. David does not have a good track record in his family life. He is not on the ballot for father of the year in Palestine. And it is in this setting that Solomon is born for Bathsheba was Solomon's mother.

To David's credit, he confessed his sin and made a commitment for a fresh, new start as a father. He realized that he had failed miserably in the past. But he also recognized the fact that he had a new life to influence. Solomon had not been born out of the most favorable circumstances. He certainly would bear a stigma in his life. But rather than being consumed with guilt and discouragement, David decided to learn from his failures as a father. He decided to correct mistakes and go in a new direction. He made this decision very late in his life. But it was a decision that he committed himself to. And this decision made all the difference in the world for the nation of Israel. For while the Jewish nation would certainly suffer from the internal family problems of David's family, they would benefit to an even greater degree from David's influence in the life of Solomon. Solomon's decision to choose wisdom and understanding as his highest priority would bring untold blessing to the nation of Israel. And that decision was influenced by his father, David.

There are two tools in the arsenal of the Devil that I believe are most effective in thwarting the influence God intends for Christian fathers to have in their families. We have already discussed the first one - that is failure.

Fathering mistakes can easily bring discouragement to fathers. Satan loves to keep fathers buried under the burden of guilt and shame for past mistakes. But the other temptation the Devil loves to whisper in the ears of Christian fathers is the message *it's too late. You had your chance and you missed it. Now it's too late.*

If King David would have listened to those words *it's too late*, the nation of Israel would have been robbed of 40 years of peace and prosperity. But David didn't listen to the Devil's message. He knew that it is never too late to do what is right. David realized his many failures in the past and he confessed those sins before God. But then he decided that he would pick up the pieces and start all over again with this new baby named Solomon.

A child's relationship with his or her father is something that lasts a lifetime. Of course, it changes with the different seasons of life - but it is always there. Those of us who have lost our fathers know the void that we experience in our lives because he's not here any longer. Let me encourage you to not look at the past, but to look towards the future. If you are a grandfather, there are not only children but also grandchildren to influence. If you are a father whose children are grown, there is still a relationship there that needs to be fostered and with that relationship will come more influence than you know. If you are a father who still has children in the home, it's never too late to commit yourself to building relationships. Don't take your positions lightly. Realize the potential for influence that God has given to you. Don't allow past mistakes and failures to overwhelm you with discouragement. Commit yourself afresh to the ministry that God has given to you as a father.