



UNDER GOD'S PROTECTION

PART FIVE

*Stand therefore – hold your ground,
– having tightened **the belt of truth** around your loins . . . “*
Ephesians 6:14 AMPV

Some translations refer to buckling the belt of truth around the waist, but I have chosen one of the versions using 'loins' for a specific reason. The word loins can refer to the reproductive organs or literally the womb. Today I would like to spend some time thinking about the fruit of our marriage, i.e., our children. The last series dealt with the progression of a Christian from “babyhood” to full maturity. This time I want to focus on the role of the parents.

The phrases “*feed My lambs*” and “*feed My sheep*” have been on my mind for a number of weeks, but yesterday I suddenly realised why. If we turn to John 21:15-17 we read the story of Jesus waiting for His disciples on the beach of the Sea of Tiberias. He asked Peter three times, “*Do you love me?*” Jesus followed every challenge with an instruction. Firstly “*Feed My lambs*” and then secondly and thirdly “*Feed My sheep*”. I noticed in the Amplified Version in verse 16, the 2nd time Jesus answered He said, “Shepherd (tend) my sheep.” He was asking Peter to consider a career change from fisherman to shepherd!

The timing of this incident is significant, it is post-resurrection, but pre-ascension and Pentecost. Peter had spent three amazing years sitting at the feet of Jesus, absorbing His wisdom and hearing the Scriptures taught in depth. However, he had not yet put all of it into practice. Peter, in this same chapter had said to Thomas, Nathaniel, James and John, “I am going fishing”. He had not yet been commissioned to “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel...*” (Mark 16:15) He had gone back to his old life - fishing was familiar territory!

Jesus' challenge was fitting – “*Do you love Me?*” – do you love Me enough to leave your old occupation? – Do you love me enough to lay down your life for Me? Do you love Me enough to endure what I have suffered?

Peter had not yet been filled with the Holy Spirit and there was the key in Acts 1:5. Jesus promised His disciples that they would be baptised with the Holy Spirit, and in verse 8 He explains the effects.

“But you shall receive power – ability, efficiency and might – when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;”

By now you are perhaps thinking, but what has all this got to do with parenthood? If we turn to 1 Timothy 3: 1-7, Paul deals with the sort of man an elder should be. Another name for an elder (or bishop) is a shepherd. A shepherd feeds and cares for lambs and sheep. There is a sense in which **all Christian fathers should be “elders” in their own homes**. I am going to pull out just some of the pre-requisites of eldership:

- Above reproach
- The husband of one wife
- Self-controlled
- Hospitable
- Capable and qualified teacher
- Not given to wine
- Gentle and considerate, not quarrelsome
- Not a lover of money
- Must rule his own house well, keeping his children under control.
- Have a good reputation in the community he lives in

Just as we saw the importance of the godly pattern for the husband/wife relationship, it is vital that the father is the head of the home, a man that his children can look up to and trust. He stands accountable for his children, just as the elder stands accountable for the members of the church who submit to him. In both the father/child and elder/church member relationship, sometimes there are clashes, but we are still called to submit to our father or elder because we are covered by his protection. The father and elder have the responsibility of making decisions which will affect us one way or another. Whether we feel they are right or not we still have to honour them, and in so doing we are showing our submission and love for Christ.

That list is not unattainable. Let's go back to Peter. What changed him from the fearful man who denied Jesus three times to a powerful apostle? Jesus enabled Peter to become a strong leader within the church because of the infilling of the Holy Spirit. We can achieve nothing worthwhile if we rely on our own gifts and abilities. If we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, not only our life is changed, but those of the folk around us.

I would like to challenge our 'fathers' with Jesus' words, "Do you love Me?"

- Do you love Me enough to sacrificially care for your 'lambs'? (young children) "sheep" (teenagers and young adults)
- Do you love Me enough to lead by example?
- Do you love Me enough to teach your children the Word of God and spend time praying with them?
- Do you love Me enough to put your family's needs before your own?
- Do you love Me enough to protect your children at all costs?

Let's look a little closer at the verse we began with and pick out three thoughts:

Stand therefore – hold your ground – having tightened the belt of truth around your loins . . .

1. **Stand therefore** – Standing implies stability, strength and balance in an upright position. The word ‘stand’ is used in a number of different ways in the Bible – stand afar off, standing outside, standing around (implying they were achieving nothing) but the standing we need, is the decisive ‘stand’ spoken by Paul when he commanded the cripple in Lystra (Acts 14:10)

“Stand up on your feet! At that the man jumped up and began to walk”

God does not want a Christian father to be ineffective and “paralysed” in his ability to lead his family. He needs men of strength and purpose, filled with a passion to see his children grow into all that God meant them to be. You are standing in God’s authority and if you have been baptised in the Holy Spirit, then you have His power, and He will give you the wisdom to make the right decisions.

2. **Hold your ground.** This is just another way of saying ‘stand’ but it implies the need to stick to your convictions. Once you have made a decision, then it’s important not to allow children to manipulate a different outcome. If you have said No! or asked that a task is completed, follow it up and see it to the end. Children will always take liberties and be disobedient if they know that they can get away with it. It takes discipline from both parents to “hold their ground” but the outcome is always joy.

“Discipline your children, and they will give you peace of mind and will make your heart glad.” Proverbs 29:17 New Living Translation

And in **Hebrews 12:6a, 7** God Himself is our example – just as we submit to God’s discipline, the same must apply to our sons and daughters. We show our love for them by asking them to submit to our direction.

“For the Lord corrects and disciplines everyone whom He loves...”

You must submit to and endure (correction) for discipline. God is dealing with you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not train, correct and discipline.”

Ephesians 6:4 *“Fathers do not irritate and provoke your children to anger – do not exasperate them to resentment – but rear them (tenderly) in the training and discipline and the counsel and admonition of the Lord.”*

3. **Belt of truth.** Honesty is the plumbline for all relationships. We need to hold our children accountable for the mistakes that they have made and encourage them to own up when they are in the wrong. Telling lies is the easy way out – the avoidance of punishment. The sad thing about dishonesty is that it can become a habit which is very difficult to break. A dishonest child grows into a dishonest adult. God wants us to be men and women of integrity, people that can be trusted.

“...Let our lives lovingly express truth in all things - speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly. Enfolded in love, let us grow up in every way and in all things unto Him, Who is the Head, (even) Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One.”

Ephesians 4:15 AMPV

So, what about mothers? When we considered marriage last week it was clear that husband and wife become one. It is vital that the way the children are brought up is consistent in both mother and father. It is of no value having a strong father and a weak mother, or vice versa. If a child feels that they can get their own way by playing one parent against the other, it can cause unbelievable conflict.

In Titus 2: 3-4 Paul gives instruction on how older women are to behave – so grandmothers – we too can play our part! In verses 4 and 5 we are asked to encourage younger women to love their husbands and children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good-natured and submissive to their husband. The easiest way to teach is by example – actions definitely speak louder than words! or

“What you do speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say!”

Nowadays life can be extremely challenging for young mothers as so many of them have chosen to work because of financial constraints. Juggling work and home demands can be a huge strain and sometimes the needs of children suffer because of it. However, parenting is a joint responsibility so when our husbands show their love for us by easing the burden and sharing the tasks, it makes a huge difference.

I think we all know that well known verse in Proverbs 22:6 but it’s well worth repeating:

“Train up a child in the way he should go (and in keeping with his individual gift or bent) and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

I like that addition in the brackets that the Amplified version gives us. Each child is an individual and responds in a different way. There is no such thing as a perfect recipe for bringing up a child as so many factors play into the mix. As long as there is a healthy balance between discipline and love, our children will flourish and grow up into caring, productive adults that God can use.

Moms are known for “multitasking” – perhaps that’s the best description we have for a Christian Mom. She begins by carrying (in the womb), she prays for, comforts, feeds, cares, watches over, teaches and most of all loves and nurtures unconditionally.

In the life of Jesus, we read more of Mary his mother, than of Joseph. In Luke 2 we read of both parents in the account of the boy Jesus in the temple. His parents were frantic when they could not find him and searched for Him for three days. Though they did not understand His words, *“Did you not know that it is necessary for Me to be in My Father’s House and about my Father’s business.”* (v. 49)

His following actions showed the result of correct parenting. (v. 51a, 52)

“And He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. And Jesus increased in wisdom (in broad and full understanding) and in stature and years, and in favour with God and man.”

We cannot ask for a better outcome for our children. The greatest joy we are ever given is to see our children serving God and “growing in favour with “God and man.”

Set aside some time this week, as a couple, to specifically pray for your children.