

Task #5 - Getting Your Story Straight
The 12 Tasks of an Effective Father

One day I was riding around in my automobile, and I noticed that there was a slight odor. I took note of that, and a couple of days went by and the odor began to increase, so I realized that we were having some pretty serious problems. Then I realized, this is driving me crazy!

It looks like we might do a little article in the Sentinel on the ministry, and so this is Red Huber, everybody, and Red is here to take a couple of pictures that may be used for that article. What Red doesn't know is that I walk all over the place, and so he's in my line of ...

So the smell was beginning to develop in my car, and I said, "Golly, it smells like a dead animal." I'm not a very mechanical person; I have trouble getting the lid off a peanut butter jar, but I started looking around the car and thought maybe it was in the trunk. I looked in the trunk, and a few days went by, and it was getting worse and worse and worse. I thought maybe something crawled up in the engine, and died on the engine and is cooking there, I don't know, so I looked all around the engine and couldn't find it. Finally, after about two weeks when I was telling Patsy about it, it was really horrible. I decided I would have to take this car apart piece by piece. After about 20 minutes of looking around the interior cabin of the car, they have little pouches, as you know, behind seats in a lot of cars, and our car happened to have these pouches. I happened to look in the pouch right behind me, and there was a little plastic sandwich baggy that my son had put in there after he had eaten half of some green sandwich, and had just about totally ruined the car. It took another month to get the smell completely out of the car. That will become very relevant to our message today as we move on.

This morning I want to talk to you about the idea of stories, and the importance of giving our kids stories. Neal Postman says that, some of you may know him, he's a very interesting cultural commentator, "Human beings need stories to give meaning to the facts of their existence." We need to have meaningful stories to make sense of our world. We need to have stories to give us a filter through which we can sift all of the different data, the bits and pieces that come at us, and make sense out of our lives. Not only that, all stories that have plausibility claim, at least, to explain human suffering and human happiness. In other words, if a story did not have plausibility nobody would listen to it. In other words, no body gives their life to a story or to an idea or to a system if they thought it was false and didn't think it would not meet their needs. That's a starting point for this message this morning - the idea of story.

I am going to go ahead to give you the big idea now, and I am going to ask you to write this down. Even you guys who never write things down, I want you to write this down today - everyone of you, okay? This is going to be the longest big idea that I've ever given you because it's going to have two sentences instead of one. Now I realize this is a real challenge for some of you, but you can do it.

Number One: Our children need a story that is not only plausible, but true. You're not writing! You're not writing! I know you have photographic memories; okay, this guy really does have a photographic memory. Our children need a story that is not only plausible, but true, and, our children need a story that is not only true, but plausible.

Now what kinds of stories are there? What are some of the stories that are out there? I'd better give you a couple of examples to lubricate the thinking here. One story we know is out there is what we always call the American dream, right? What does this story tell us? Basically that if you want to be happy, if you want to overcome suffering, if you want something badly enough, and believe you can accomplish it, basically there is nothing in this world that you cannot achieve. It's the idea that we can build a great life, and sometimes we can insulate ourselves from the problems of other people. Certainly that would be desirable in many cases.

What are some of the other stories that are out there? Okay, I'm glad I'm doing this lesson this morning then. Another story out there would be the story of human progress. This is really the story of modernity,

for those of you who are more intellectually inclined, but it is the idea of human optimism. It's the idea called the perfectibility of western civilization. This was the dominant idea in the 20th Century. It's that man is basically good, and that if we work hard at it, we can eliminate the problems of sin and poverty in the world. Of course, we all know that that's been pretty much debunked with the world wars and the gulags?? that they found over in Russia. People don't really hold to that intellectually anymore, but you will find that the residue of that is very, very dominant in many places.

What other stories are out there? What is it? Personal stories. Give me more; things that happened to you, personal stories. What are some other examples? What about technological progress? The idea that machines are going to be able to solve the problems that humans couldn't solve. You see a whole generation of people who really think that we're going come up with a technological paradise. So that's another story.

What are some of the other stories out there? What is it? Human tragedy. We're talking about a parenting, fathering, class here. This idea of human tragedy, or I'm going to use the word that all is futile, or I'm going to put up on the board here, neologism. If you don't know what it is, look it up - you're kids know, because if they're going to the University of Florida they're studying neechee???. That's the dominant idea on the campus at the University of Florida, that there is no meaning, that everything is futile.

I'll tell you a story. My daughter who interned at a university for a campus ministry for two years befriended a young girl. This young girl grew up in a home where her mother was a devout Christian, but her father was very violent, and her parents divorced at a young age. This young woman, for the entire time she was at the university, went to the campus ministry meeting every week. My daughter became movie buddies with her. They went to movies. My daughter said she was in a Bible study in a small group Bible studies for the entire two years she was there. For the last year my daughter was there, she met with this young girl once a week. That's her story. She is very bitter about life, even though her mother is a strong Christian. You know what she said? Now, this is a little indelicate, okay? I realize this may shock the sensibilities of some of you men, but get over it because this is what's going on out there. This is what she said, "Jen, I believe in God, but I think he sucks." It's a very dominating story that's out there today.

What are some of the other stories that are out there? (Could not understand word!!) Let's call that Doug Green???? There is a story out there. What are some other stories? You've got the whole new age. It's an interesting thing. I am going to put up science, and then I'm going to put contra science, I'm going to put spiritism.

Its interesting, the science story basically told us that everything is an accident. We came from an accident, and we're going to end up in an accident, and that you can't explain anything by supernatural causes, only by natural causes, and, therefore, there is no unseen world, so how in the world can you make any sense out of human suffering? How can you find the happiness that is elusive if your relegated to what you see? Paul wrote, "If only for this world we have hope in Jesus Christ, we are to be pitied more than all people." If there is no resurrection from the dead, let us then eat, drink and merry for tomorrow we die. That's what science left to us. Well, people have reacted to this, and maybe they haven't come to the Christian story, but they've gotten involved in all kinds of stories like new age.

Any other stories you can think of? What is it? I can't hear you. Folklore. I'm going to put Legends up here. There are all kinds of ideas out there; even in Greek mythology, there are all kinds of interesting stories of that nature.

How about the yuppies tale which many of you probably don't want me to talk about, right, because it might be your story? The yuppies tale is the story of consumerism. Consumerism is the economic theory that an increasingly greater consumption of goods is beneficial. Some of you need to do a gut check on this, right? But that's a big story that's out there. What is the problem that we have? I'll put the Christian story up here, too, to make sure it's legitimate as a Bible study this morning.

The Christian story: Now these are the stories that are out there. What's the problem these might present do you suppose? Let me tell you what the problem is. Howard Henrich ??? says that four out of five of your children will drop out of church by the time they become seniors in high school. Do you hear what I just said? Four out of five your children are going to drop out of church by the time they become seniors in high school. Why are they going to do that? Because they don't see, you haven't, we haven't, they haven't learned that the Christian story is not only plausible, but true. Or they've been hammered that the Christian story is true, but because of the way we live, they don't believe it's plausible.

That's the deal men; that's the deal. Our children need a story that is not only plausible. What's the problem here with these stories? What's an observation? They're not true, but they are what? Plausible. Here's what happens, men. If these stories have no traces of truth, do you think anyone would follow them, believe them? Of course not. Here's what's going on is that all of these stories in the beginning look good. Some of them look real good. Some of them really look plausible. They really look like they explain human suffering and human happiness.

Now for the Scripture. I was at a wedding last Saturday evening, and I ran across an old friend, a fellow I've known for a very long time. He's an attorney, I'll tell you that much about him, but that's all I'll tell you though. We had a delightful conversation. He is one of the finest men I have ever known. He has squeaky, clean morals, incredible integrity, good-looking guy, happens to have a lot of money, even married into a family where there's a lot of money, lives very well, he's living the American dream, he's living the yuppies tale, he's a poster child for human progress, his personal story is incredible. He's just a great guy. I happened to say to him, "... to church? You know, I've really always admired you very much, and I just wish our paths would have been set up so we would have been able to spend more time together as we both grew up around here." He said, "You know, I feel the same way." Then we talked for a couple more minutes, and I said, "I need to go now." He looked at me. You know what, men? He's lonely. You could just see the loneliness in his eyes. He said, "Do you think we could get together and have lunch sometime?" It was almost a plea. I'm going to follow up on that and see where that goes.

What's the problem? The problem is that he has given the best years of his life to a story that isn't true. He's given the best years of his life to a story that looks plausible, but in the end, here's what happens. All stories, except Christianity, come to nothing. What happens is all these stories look good in the beginning, but what happens is that they do a tailspin, and only the Christian story is resurrection.

Look at this text together, Psalm 73. It says this, "Truly God is good to Israel to those whose hearts are pure, but as for me I came so close to the edge of the cliff." I'm reading, by the way, out of the New Living Translation, so if you want you can read along in your Bible or you can just listen. "My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone. For I envied the proud, when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness." These are the people who are following some of these stories like the yuppies tale, the American dream, some of these other stories. They are doing well today; they are doing well today. "For they seem to live such a painless life, their bodies are so healthy and strong, they aren't troubled like other people or plagued with problems like everyone else, they wear a problem like a jeweled necklace, and their clothing is woven and ... These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for. They scoff and speak only evil. In their pride they seem to crush others, they boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth. And so, the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words. Does God realize what is going on, they ask?" I've had a week fellows. Yesterday I said, "God, what in the world are you doing here? A close friend dies, not unexpectedly, but dies; a couple of people involved in a moral problem; a 60- year old woman who has been divorced, and has a husband who professed Christ and is now assailing her with all kinds of profanities." We spent some time with her Wednesday night, Patsy and I. So yesterday I said, "What are you doing here? I can do a better job." All the suffering. "Does God realize what is going on, they ask? Is the most high eden aware of what is happening? Look at these arrogant people enjoying a life of ease while the riches multiply. Was it for nothing that I kept myself pure?" That's what that young girl wants to know. Yes, I believe in God, I think.

She's a very moral young girl, and wants to keep herself pure and be a virgin when she gets married; an incredible young girl. "Was it for nothing that I kept my heart pure and kept myself from doing wrong? All I did was trouble all day long. Every morning brings me pain, that's her cry. That's the cry of a lot of young people; that's the cry of a lot of adult people. If I had really spoken this way, I would have been a traitor to you people, so I try to understand why the wicked prosper. Then one day I went into your sanctuary, God, and I thought about the destiny of the wicked. Truly you put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction. In an instant they are destroyed, swept away by tears. Their present life is only a dream that is gone when they awake." All stories, men, all stories except the Christian story come to nothing.

Our children need a story that is not only plausible, but true. So what is the problem? The problem is a lot of fathers have been giving the best years of their lives to a story that isn't true, then they pass this story along to their children as they sit, the Deuteronomy 6 passage we've looked at here before, they sit, they talk as they go along the way, they talk about their stories, they talk about their stories at the dinner table, what we believe in, and we pass along our story to our children.

A story is either true or untrue, but no doubt one that is plausible. Question? What's your story? What do you need to know? First of all, you need to know three things. You need to know, I'm going to give you three words, plausibility, promise and profits.

Plausibility: You need to know that all of these stories will have some ring of truth to your children as perhaps they have to you. All stories that are making it have plausibility. As one of my professors said, "It takes a lot of truth to float an error." If there was no truth in here, they wouldn't float.

Promise: All stories promise to offer an explanation for human suffering and elusive happiness. Some of the more despairing types of ideas may say that you can never be happy, but at least they offer an explanation, they promise an explanation that does satisfy at some level; that's plausibility.

The other thing you need to know, three things, I'm using the profits so I have three "p" words here. Each of these stories has profits that are articulating the tenants of the story. Each of these stories has priests who are administering the sacraments, if you will, of the story; administering to people who have problems. Each of these stories has evangelists who believe deeply in them and are out selling them to people. Each of these stories has disciples, followers.

Now, what do you need to do? A couple of things you need to do; a couple of things we all need to do. The first thing we need to do is we need to get our own story straight. If you don't have your own story straight, how are you going to teach something you don't know? The first application is to let's make sure we have our stories straight, men, and then let's make sure we're living out our story. Let's not have one story on Sunday, one story on Friday morning, and then a different story at the dinner table. Let's have one story, let's get it straight, and let's show that story to our kids.

Secondly, this may shock you. One of the worst things you can do is to only teach your children the Christian story. One of the very worst things you can do is to only teach your children the Christian story. Instead, you need, we need, I need to teach our children that there all kinds of stories that have plausibility. There's only one story that's true. We need to teach our children what the stories are because they're getting them; you don't have to teach them the stories, you just need to put them in perspective, because they're already getting these stories. We need to help our children understand that there are different stories, what are the differences between these stories, and show them why Christianity is the only true story, why Christianity is the superior story. What is the superiority of the Christian story above all these other stories? Because our children need a story that is not only plausible, but true. But, our children also need a story that is not only true, but plausible.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, Lord some of us ourselves have stumbled through many years of our lives, often some of the best years of our lives, committed to a story that seemed plausible, but wasn't true. Sometimes we have been able to articulate that, and sometimes it's just been something that's happened to us. But, Lord, I pray that as we a result of our time here together today that no man would be uncertain about his own story, and I pray that you would show each of us, tutor each of us, in how we can help our children to understand, not only the Christian story, but all these stories, to understand what the difference is between them are and to understand the superiority of the Christian story. If you would do this, Lord, we would be very grateful, and we would give you all the glory and praise for it. And now I make this prayer on behalf of all these men here together, and let's say it together, Amen.

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