



part 1 of 2—

# Thoughts From a Pastor / Dad

by C. Stanley Burgess

I have two grown sons. They spent much of their lives in a parsonage. In spite of that, or perhaps because of it, I often wonder how good a job I did raising them. Did I transfer my values, and more importantly, my faith to them? Are they as well prepared for life as they should be? These are questions many fathers ask themselves.

Certainly those dads whose calling is to Christian ministry occasionally have anxious thoughts about their success at parenting. It is difficult enough to raise children today, and this is compounded by the fact 80 percent of pastors polled stated that their ministry made a generally negative impact on their families.

## The Church or Christ?

My boys were raised in the church. I was their pastor. It is at this point I may have made my greatest mistakes. I fear that I talked to them more about the church than I did about Jesus. In retrospect, I can see that my efforts were directed as much to molding them in the image of the church as to modeling the life of Jesus.

If I could retrace the journey, I would teach them to worship God, not merely to perfect the mannerisms required to meet the standards of church behav-

ior. I would tell them more that there is a personal God who is concerned over every aspect of their lives. I would not allow God to be confined to four walls. That is what we often do to limit God. The church is not the greatest example of Christlikeness; Christ is.



## Don't Complain

If I could do it again, I wouldn't complain about the church when my boys were listening. We never served within a congregation that was anywhere close to perfection. There were those who sat in positions of authority in the congregation who had no faith. Others held authority beyond the local level and admonished the pastor:

"Have faith; God will take care of you." It didn't help to watch as they drove expensive automobiles and lived luxuriously while our family lived somewhere around the poverty level.

I've learned to overlook those people and forgive them for their negative effects on my family. Have my sons? I wonder. Certainly, they observed enough on their own without my contributing to it. But that does not excuse my statements.

## Pray for Understanding

If I had the opportunity to go back, I'd pray that they be given a spirit of understanding.

I'd ask God to help the oldest understand that when he served as bus captain, it was to let the unredeemed know they could have salvation through Christ, even though they were of a different skin color than himself.

I'd ask that the youngest would realize that when his dad was pitching softball (even though he was too old) it was to proclaim the message that Christians can have clean fun.

When he heard the prison doors clang behind him as he went with his father to conduct Bible studies for federal inmates, I hope he understood that we were loving social castoffs and telling them that God extends a

loving hand to any who will reach out to Him.

I threw myself into the work of the Lord and left most of the nurturing of our sons to their

mother. I hope they realize that their father did what he did because God reached him when he didn't deserve salvation, and that his desire was to spread the love of God to others.

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### Questions for Further Study—

1. As a pastor and a father (or mother), what steps can you take to raise your children in the image of Christ instead of that of the church?
2. What are the effects of complaining about the church in front of your children?
3. What are some things you hope your children will understand as you fulfill God's calling on your life as a minister?

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**M**y greatest skills have been making mistakes and blunders. Given a new chance, I'd teach my boys that it's OK to be different. I was a difficult child for my parents to raise, and I've been equally challenging to God. I grew up with little self-worth, the product of parents with low self-esteem. Yet God loved me unconditionally.

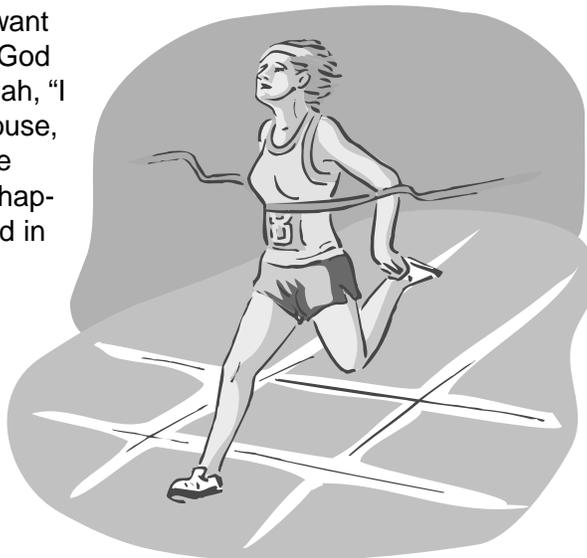
Was I able to convince my sons they could meet any challenge life might bring—and do it in their own uniqueness? I want them to know the truth that God shared with me from Jeremiah, “I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him” (18:3,4). God (the Potter) fashions us, and we do not all have to conform to the same mold.

## The Ultimate Finish Line

I would also like to have the opportunity to go back to the days when they were youngsters, throwing a ball back and forth to their dad, and tell them how to finish well.

Paul was concerned over this

when he wrote: “I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). My sons are both runners and have won numerous awards and honors. They know how to run well and how to finish well. They need to know that it is vital to have a personal relationship with God through His Son, our Savior. When they cross the ultimate finish line, I want them to know they were running the right course, and they ran it well.



## When You're Gone

Someday their dad will be gone. How will they do? When the oldest dribbles down the basketball court and throws a pass out to the wing where his dad always was, how will he react when the ball bounces out

of bounds, untouched? When he realizes the “old man” isn't there anymore, will he play the game with increased drive and enthusiasm? When the youngest climbs to the top of a mountain pass at the 80-mile mark of a bike race, and he doesn't see his dad there to encourage him, what will he do? Will he pedal with more resolve and determination to reach the finish line? To each I believe the answer is yes.

## Tell Them How You Feel

My sons are men now. When they were boys, I was always present at the major events in their lives. I watched the ball games, listened to the concerts, went to the races, taught them how to drive. One thing I did not do—I didn't share my feelings. I trusted that they captured my devotion to them through my actions, and not words. This was a mistake. A mistake my father made and I repeated.

Dad, if your little ones are still at home, tell them every day how you feel. I can no longer influence two little boys as I tuck them into bed at night like I once could. But I can still tell them the things of which I have just written. I guess the best I can do is to let them read this article and say, “Love you, guys.”

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### Questions for Further Study—

1. As a pastor and a father (or mother), what would you want your children to know once they cross that final finish line?
2. What do you hope your children will think and do once you are gone from their lives?
3. Why is it important to tell your children how you feel?

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