

Chasing Sticks

The Affections of a Godly Man – Part I

Romans 1:8

Introduction

Steven Lawson wrote these provocative words in his book entitled, *The Legacy*,

Every man leaves a lasting influence . . . that will affect future generations for centuries to come. But let's face it, not all legacies are the same, some are productive, others are destructive, some are illustrious, others are infamous. What kind of a legacy will you leave behind? A spiritual legacy is one that money can't buy and taxes can't take away, it is passing down to the next generation what matters most.ⁱ

This tells us that every man leaves a lasting influence. Is that true?

We know that the very nature of the transmitting of doctrinal truth is the responsibility of one godly man who is to pass it along and through another godly man. It is the passing of a legacy.

Paul told Timothy, in II Timothy, chapter 2, verse 2,

The things which you have heard from me . . . entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

I find it interesting that we are told, in Titus, chapter 2, verses 3 through 5, that older godly women are likewise to teach younger women how to live godly lives.

The truth of Scripture is like a priceless heirloom handed from one generation of believers to the next. Is it any surprise then, that the vast majority of people

who come to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, come to Him as young children?!

J. Oswald Sanders quoted from a famous study of two families who lived during the same era in American history. The two families, from the state of New York, were carefully studied. One was the Jonathan Edwards family and the other was the Max Jukes family.

Jonathan Edwards was a godly man who lived for the glory of God. He married a woman who also followed Jesus Christ. Over the next one hundred fifty years, among their descendants were:

- fourteen presidents of universities,
- one vice president of the United States,
- three congressmen,
- thirty judges,
- sixty physicians,
- sixty authors,
- one hundred attorneys, and
- three hundred theological professors, missionaries, and pastors.

Max Jukes was an unbeliever. He married a woman who was also an unbeliever. During the same era, among their descendants were:

- more than one hundred alcoholics,
- one hundred ninety prostitutes,
- three hundred vagrants,
- one hundred thirty felons who served an average of thirteen years each, with seven of them sentenced for murder, and

- out of the one thousand two hundred descendants, only twenty of them learned an honest trade, but ten of them learned their trade while serving in the state prison.

The family of Max Jukes cost the state of New York an estimated 1.5 million dollars to care for them over the years.

Certainly Sanders revealed two extremes, but the principle remains that one godly influence can impact a number of generations.

What would the evidence of our own generation suggest, as to the model we seem to be following?

A study conducted by the University of Rhode Island, now describes the most dangerous place, outside of riots and war, to be the American home. On a national scale, the average American home is filled with anger and violence. Thirty percent of American couples experience some form of domestic violence in their lifetime. Two million couples have used a gun, a knife, or other lethal weapon on one another during their marriage. Twenty percent of all police officers who are killed in the line of duty, are killed while answering calls involving family fights.ⁱⁱ

What kind of man would use a lethal weapon or carry out some other form of violence on his wife? What kind of man would physically endanger or emotionally devastate his children, as they live through his violence?

I had lunch with a man recently, who can remember, even though he was only five years old, watching his father knock his mother to the floor and then yell at her to get up so he could beat her down again. Paul said that these men would not be the exception, but the rule. Perhaps they would not all be violent in that way, but would be equally vile in other ways.

Paul wrote, in II Timothy, a description of men during the last days. We have been living in the last days for over two thousand years. Paul's description of a man in the first century applies today, as if he had written it about men in this century. He wrote, in chapter 3, verses 1 through 4,

But realize this, that in the last days . . . men will be lovers of self, . . .

(that is the first description, and it probably serves as a categorical description of all of the other descriptions; of the eighteen things Paul will describe men to be, this one is the summary – men are in love with themselves, and they are,)

. . . lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful,

unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Could there be a more fitting description of a man of this century than that?

Now, it would be comfortable, to some degree, to simply give statistics, illustrations, and verses on how bad it is outside of the church. We could all sit in church and cluck our tongues and shake our heads and say, “My, my, those unholy, self-centered men out there.”

The trouble is, the church itself is crying out for men to stand up and take their role of godly leadership in the home and in the church. The typical church service has fifty nine percent female attendees versus forty one percent male attendees. Married women who attend church without their husbands outnumber, by four to one, the men attending without their wives. One major denomination recently released the fact that eighty five percent of the subscribers to its premier devotional booklet were women. This same statistic is proven by the fact that the overwhelming majority of books purchased in Christian bookstores are bought by women. The majority of the ministries in church and para-church organizations of the world are organized, prayed over, and moved along by women. The cry of the church, today more than ever, is, “Where have all the godly men gone?”

Do you know what I have discovered about godly women? The more godly a woman is, the more desirous she is to have godly men lead the way. The closer she walks with Christ, the more deeply she agonizes over the fact that the men around her do not walk with Christ.

I have never yet had a woman come to me and say, “Stephen, I don't know what to do.”

“Oh, what's the problem?”

“Well, my husband has stopped watching television all the time and, would you believe it, I saw him reading His Bible the other day. It's making me feel really insecure. He's even spent money on several Christian books lately – and he's reading them. And in the car, he keeps bringing God up in the conversation with the kids. I wish he'd stop praying with the children. What am I supposed to do, Stephen, he just keeps making one biblical decision after another? I can't take it any more!”

Wouldn't that be great?

What I have been asked over and over is, “Stephen, my husband won’t pray before we eat at home, or with our kids, is it wrong for me to do that in his place?” or “Pastor, my husband complains about giving money to the Lord, is it wrong for me to give some of mine without his permission, or will the Lord understand if I don’t?” or “Stephen, my husband won’t ever bring scripture into a conversation, would I be preachy if I did every once in a while?”

Where have all the godly men gone? Perhaps it is time to stop and evaluate where we stand. What kind of legacy will you leave?

Kent Hughes, in one of his commentaries, recounted a Charlie Brown cartoon. Linus had just thrown a stick for Snoopy to retrieve. Snoopy’s first instinct was to chase after the stick and bring it back, only to have Linus throw it again for Snoopy to bound after it all over again. This time, however, Snoopy suddenly stops and decides against running after it. He says to his reading audience, “I want people to have more to say about me after I’m gone than, ‘He was a nice guy . . . he chased sticks.’”

I personally believe that we have in our church, enough men to start a spiritual revolution; to so effectively transfer a spiritual legacy that is so clear and true, so biblically distinctive and passionate, that the world would never be the same.

The Affections of a Godly Man

Dogs chase after sticks, because most of them have a natural affection for chasing things like that. So, what are the affections of a godly man?

I want to do something that I was told not to do in seminary; that is to, “Never isolate a portion of your audience.”

That is exactly what I intend to do, however, as I preach these messages primarily to men, both young and old.

Now, obviously, biblical truth is easily applied across lines of gender and age. Furthermore, this will be truth for every married woman to pray that her husband will live; this will be about the kind of man you can encourage your daughters to marry; this will be about the kind of man you will want your son to become.

We want to answer the questions, “What does a godly man chase after, long for, and desire? How does he talk? How does he live?”

The answer begins in the second sentence of Romans, chapter 1. For the first time, Paul begins to

write on a personal note, with intimate and heart revealing language.

Nearly a year ago, as I carefully read this chapter again, in light of this exposition through Romans, I penciled a word in the margin of this paragraph. It was the word “affection”.

Paul, perhaps unknowingly, yet by the grace of an inspiring God, models for us the affections of a godly man. Let us read the first few verses of this paragraph. Look at Romans, chapter 1, verses 8 through 12.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine.

Affection for God Himself

1. The first affection of a godly man is, affection for God Himself.

Notice Paul’s words, in Romans, chapter 1, verse 8, when he reveals his investment of prayer on behalf of the believers living in Rome and his close relationship with God. In fact, his prayer was based upon intimacy with God and intercession through Jesus Christ. Paul writes,

. . . I thank my God through Jesus Christ . . .

He did not say, “I thank my wife’s God . . .” or “I thank my children’s God . . .” or “I thank my co-workers’ God . . .”.

No! He said, “I thank *my* God . . .”!

Martin Luther, the Reformer, once said that Christianity was the “religion of possessive pronouns.”

Anyone can say “God,” but only Christians can utter the words, “my God.” The godly man has a living, active, intimate, personal, possessive relationship with God. His first and foremost affection is for his God.

That is the very reason Paul can precede the words, “my God,” with those astounding words, “I thank”. And, you might think, “You have got to be kidding! This is the man who was stoned, beaten, jailed, mistreated, shipwrecked, jeered at, and ultimately, imprisoned in Rome, where, it is believed, he was executed.”

The Holy Spirit had already told him, according to Acts, chapter 20, verse 23, that wherever he went, bonds and afflictions would await him.

Paul would eventually, spend time in the Mamertine Prison in Rome. One commentator pointed out that this prison was connected to the city’s sewage system, which ran past the main gate of the prison. The prisoners were sent there to die, either at the hands of the guards or from starvation. After a prisoner’s death, the guards simply flooded the chamber with sewer water and washed the corpse away.

How could Paul ever say, and how can any godly man ever have on his lips, the ever-present words, “I thank!”?

This is only possible when you can say, “My God.”

Paul began by saying,

I thank my God . . . for you . . .

In other words, “I am investing part of my life in praying for you.”

That investment requires spiritual vigilance. It requires the discipline of refusal. You will most likely have to turn something down in order to find time to pray.

For example, the average “unchurched” man watches two to three hours of television each night. The average “churched” man watches thirty minutes less per night.

Ask yourself the questions, “Who is praying for my wife? Who is praying for my children? Who is praying for my church? Who is praying for my country?”

You will never get to this kind of investment, if all you ever do is chase after sticks.

Paul said,

First, I thank my God . . . for you . . .

Can you imagine what it meant to the Christians in Rome to learn that Paul was praying for them? And, he actually did much more than that.

Affection for God’s people

2. In the first phrase of Romans, chapter 1, verse 8, Paul revealed another affection of a godly man, the affection for God’s people.

If praying requires spiritual vigilance, then this affection requires spiritual vision.

Paul said to them,

. . . I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all . . .

You might think, “Now, wait a second! Not everyone in the church at Rome deserved equal commendation. Surely there were fence sitters and benchwarmers.”

We know that Paul was writing a church that was struggling with division between Jew and Gentile. What a brilliant way to encourage unity by praising them all; by saying, in effect, “I love all of you equally!”

. . . I thank my God . . . for you all . . .

Paul knew there were some who needed to grow up. He knew who the leaders were; in fact, he will name several people, in the last chapter of Romans, who were moving the church forward. But in verse 8, he graciously commends them all – and takes the opportunity to praise the Lord for them all. That is why I say that his statement required spiritual vision.

Barclay wrote,

There are some people whose tongues are tuned to praise, and others whose tongues are tuned to criticize. There are some people whose eyes are focused to find faults, and others whose eyes are focused to discover virtues.ⁱⁱⁱ

I do not believe Paul was blindly flattering. His affection for God’s people caused him to focus on their potential, not their problems.

In his book, *Anchor Man*, Steve Farrar tells of the process of growing a very expensive grade of bamboo. In Malaysia, there is a strain of very valuable bamboo that takes great wisdom and patience to cultivate. In the first year, the seeds are planted, watered, and fertilized, but nothing visible happens. In the second year, the planted seeds are carefully and continually watered and fertilized, but again, nothing visible happens. In the third year, water and fertilizer are even more necessary, yet still, nothing visible happens. In that first three years, there is absolutely no visible indication that the work is even close to being successful. In the fourth year, water and fertilizer must still be applied, in the right amounts and at the right time, but, you guessed it,

nothing happens. In the fifth year, again, it is necessary for water and fertilizer to be diligently applied. And then, the bamboo grows ninety feet in thirty days. It does not grow nine inches in thirty days, nor nine feet in thirty days, but ninety feet!^{iv}

Now, I have to admit, that fifth year would really be exciting, wouldn't it?! I do not know about the first four, though. In fact, I would probably be interested in planting something else. Perhaps that is why chasing sticks is so much more interesting – you get immediate results. Perhaps that is why passing on a legacy to children, or a class of students, or a Bible study group is less appealing – it takes time.

Paul would say to the Ephesian elders and congregation, as recorded in Acts, chapter 20, verse 31,

*. . . night and day for a period of three years
I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.*

A Christian psychologist, wanting to determine how much time fathers spent in contact with their young children, surveyed a number of them. He said, “How much time do you spend, on an average day, talking with your children?”

The average father said, “Oh, I don't know, fifteen or twenty minutes.”

Then, with their permission, the psychologist attached microphones to the shirts of the young children, that were wired to tape recorders or walk-mans, and recorded their daily interaction. The results that came back were tragically surprising. The average father spent an average of thirty seven seconds in personal interaction. Now, of course, this did not include, “Pass the butter,” and “Do your homework.” But, in one-on-one interaction with his child or children, the average father spent no more than an average of thirty seven seconds a day!

You will never pass on a spiritual legacy in thirty seven seconds a day.

Affection for God's purposes

3. Thirdly, the affection of a godly man includes affection for God's purposes.

The affections of a godly man require spiritual vigilance, spiritual vision, and thirdly, spiritual values.

Paul writes, in the last phrase of Romans, chapter 1, verse 8, perhaps the most telling phrase of his godly character,

. . . I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

Paul, in effect, communicated, “I am so proud of you, because you have become famous for your faith. The vibrancy of your trust in God and your commitment to Him is on everybody's mind.”

Imagine how significant it would be to live in the capital city of the empire of Rome, where Nero himself lives, and never bow your knee to Caesar. What a life of faith that alone would require.

One author provoked my thinking by reminding his readers that some churches are famous for their architecture; some churches are famous for their pastor; some are famous for their organ; some are well known for their programs; others are famous for their choir; some churches are famous for their history; some are famous because of who attended in the past or the celebrities who attend now. Can you imagine, however, being famous, throughout the world, for your faith?!

One of the things that we can miss, in this phrase, is the fact that Paul is quietly encouraging their priorities by what he praises. When he could have praised a dozen things, and later he will highlight them, he first praises their faith. It is as if to say, “That's the most important thing of all.”

What impresses you the most about people? What excites you about people? What do you compliment the most in those close to you? Is it their job, their looks, their car, their title, their connections, their house, their grades?

The godly man, whose affections are driven toward God, God's people, and God's purposes, is most excited about the evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of those around him. He is most thrilled at the demonstration of faith in the lives of his beloved.

The one who is excited about those things is on his way to becoming a godly man. The one who is impressed with lesser things is probably too preoccupied with chasing sticks.

I bought a little book recently, that has a collection of stories by various authors and Christian leaders. It is entitled, *Thanks Dad, For Teaching Me Well*. One of the authors shared the following personal story about two men in his life who passed on a spiritual legacy.

My father grew up on Germantown Avenue in Philadelphia in the early 1900's. With a family of six, he lived in a second-story

apartment above the Germantown Gospel Hall, where they all worshipped. In 1917, when my dad was only five, his father wired the Gospel Hall with electricity, determined to have the job completed in time for Sunday morning worship. Grandpa worked steadily on the project from Monday after dinner until Wednesday night, when he paused for the weekly prayer meeting. He continued his work the next day and pressed forward on into the weekend. The last two nights he worked, he had a high fever, but he kept going by wrapping cold cloths around his head. By Sunday morning, the lights were working . . . but Grandpa couldn't go to the service to see them because he was in bed with the flu.

He stayed in bed all the next week. In spite of the doctor's coming to care for him, he got worse. By now, Grandpa was delirious with fever, tossing and turning, his bedclothes wet with perspiration. In a moment of lucidity, Grandpa looked at my then, five-year-old father, and, with tenderness in his eyes, put his arms around him and uttered the words, "Don't cry, hush now, God is in it."

A few moments later, he died. Fast forward to a Sunday morning when I was now five. About fifty people had gathered in a circle around a table to partake in the Lord's Supper. In the middle of the table, covered

with a white cloth, were the elements. I was lying on the floor. As my dad stood to pray, I looked up at him. And as I listened to him pray, I thought, "Whomever he's talking to means more to him than anyone else does."

The greatest gift my parents gave me was the realization that I was not the most important person in their lives. Neither was my brother. Neither were they to each other. No one was more important to them than God. I learned that everyone's life is a story whose point is discovered only when that story is lifted up into the larger story of God. We're not the point; none of us. God is. And until we see our story as only a subplot in that eternal drama, we'll never see the meaning of life. I learned that lesson from father, as he taught me the value of God.^v

That is a legacy, handed from one godly man to the next.

A godly man, who has a deep and growing affection for God, an affection for God's people, and an affection for God's purposes, is in the process of passing on a spiritual legacy, whether he can see visible signs of growth or not.

And to that man, as with the apostle Paul, no matter what happens in life, God is in it . . . God is in it!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/3/2000 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Steven J. Lawson, The Legacy (Multnomah Publishers, 1998), p. 14.

ⁱⁱ Los Angeles Times (April 27, 1978), quoted by Charles Swindoll in The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart (Word Publishers), p. 199.

ⁱⁱⁱ William Barclay, The Letter To The Romans (Westminster Press), p. 15.

^{iv} Steve Farrar, Anchor Man (Nelson Publishers), p. 17.

^v Ken Gire, Thanks Dad, For Teaching Me Well (Waterbrook Press), p. 17.