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Gleanings

What We All Need: Spiritual Fathers and Mothers



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The economic news continues to be dismal. For example, in the US unemployment is high, the federal debt is soaring, the trade imbalance continues seemingly interminably, the dollar is weak against most currencies, and the stock market displays confusion about the future. Other countries are struggling as well, such as Haiti, where uninsured property damage due to the earthquake is estimated to be in the billions (<http://www.miamiherald.com/business/story/1444187.html>).

How do we deal with this challenging economic climate? What do we need?

The brightest people on this planet are working on the problem, but they don't seem to be making much progress. Clearly, we need a guide, a model, or a picture to help us. So consider the story of John—who, though living in different times, faced his own economic calamity.

In the 1890s, young John struggled. His nascent business career was an economic disaster. He failed at teaching, bookkeeping, and selling pianos and organs. Selling sewing machines was a bit better for a season until he celebrated too long in a saloon one day. When he sobered up, he found that his wagon and product samples had been stolen. His employer promptly fired him and dunned him for the lost property. The story of this incident spread quickly, which made him the laughing-stock of the community—and who wants to hire that person? Finally, a year later he was hired to sell investments for C. B. Barron. John experienced a modicum of success, but soon the unscrupulous Barron cheated him of his commissions and again John was broke and jobless.

While working for Barron, John attempted to hedge against future financial difficulties. As an investment, he opened a butcher shop. John used his commission income to help build the business. But before the butcher shop became profitable, Barron cheated him. Unable to support the butcher shop, John had to sell it.

In the process of closing the sale, he transferred the payments for the NCR cash register to the new owner. John met with the manager, Jack Range, at the local NCR office. John used this meeting to convince Range to give him a job.

After several weeks in his new job with NCR, John had not sold anything. Range called him to account. John's excuses were quickly rebuffed by Range who went into a tirade. John decided to quit, but Range did not stop his diatribe long enough for John to talk. Finally, Range calmed down and adapted an avuncular demeanor. This surprised John and caused him to pause. Before John could resign, Range offered to personally coach John, that is, to train him to sell. John accepted.

That day Range and John made sales calls together. John's role was to watch and learn. By the end of the day, Range had sold a cash register. They continued this process—John learning from Range. Soon Range let John handle the sales calls and Range provided critiques. It took a few weeks of personal coaching by Range, but John learned to sell cash registers. Jack Range's personal coaching turned John's life around and enabled him to develop a successful career at NCR and then to move on to build one of the great companies of the twentieth century.

Jack Range served as a spiritual father to John. A spiritual father is someone who sees the divinely ordained potential in others and seeks to draw it out. Today we label spiritual fathers as coaches, mentors, and disciplers.

The best spiritual fathers are those who walk in a biblical worldview, because this is the only correct

worldview (Colossians 2:8). These spiritual fathers understand that spiritual reality drives physical reality (Genesis 1:1). Therefore economic blessing is the by-product of obedience to God and economic calamity is the fruit of disobedience (Deuteronomy 28). Furthermore, they understand that the apparent prosperity of the wicked is only temporary and, in the end, the wicked will be judged (Psalm 73).

Wise spiritual fathers always lay a foundation of biblical truth in the lives of their sons and daughters because they understand the incredible importance of spiritual reality. They also understand that this spiritual reality is not simply theoretical. Spiritual truth must be taught and applied.

We are blessed today to have many wonderful preachers and teachers—men and women who possess great oratory skills, for example, John Piper. Piper's ability to articulate theoretical spiritual truth is impressive. Recently I listened to his message on "Holding Fast the Word of Life in 2010"—eloquent and moving, but very theoretical. In this sermon, he focused on the incredible importance of the Word of God. Clearly, a very powerful and critical truth, but most people would not know how to respond. What should they do? Read the Word more, pray more, hear more sermons? These activities will bear fruit, but there is still something missing.

During the course of his sermon, Piper shared his frustration about the lifelessness of Christians, even in his own church. He seemed to be implying that although these people hear him regularly, their lives don't reflect much transformation. Some of this could be due to Piper's preaching style—maybe he is too theoretical. Perhaps there are too few real-life applications provided. More application would probably help, but I believe there is even more.

God designed the universe to work at its optimum when people are disciplined. We all need spiritual fathers and mothers in our lives to help us understand life and to help us align with God, which includes helping us take the theory of the Word of God and apply it to our vocational callings.

My thesis is that the economic calamity today is a reflection of people living largely without spiritual fathers and mothers. Even the people who hear great preaching and teaching reflect fatherless and motherless living, which is why they are lifeless and lukewarm. This is seen in the homes, workplaces, and even in our public policy.

People today rarely understand the true role of parenting. Note the general state of confusion and lack of direction of young people completing high school. Parents should be the first spiritual fathers and mothers for their children, guiding them into their divinely ordained life purpose. During the child-rearing years, parents should devote themselves to discovering the destiny of God for each child and then specifically equip each child for that destiny. Children, so trained, would enter adulthood with clarity, focus, and confidence. In my experience, parents who do this are rare.

The situation is no better in the workplace. Workers choose professions and take jobs based on money. There is almost no consideration of the call of God on their lives and there are few managers who function as spiritual fathers and mothers to help workers discern how to find their divinely ordained purpose in the workplace.

Public policy is becoming dismal worldwide. The wholesale rejection of God is in high gear. Using the false doctrine of separation of church and state, people all over the globe are rejecting God's values and principles. The real purpose of government should be to do good (Romans 13), which means that the government should fight sin and set a context for people to find and fulfill their purpose.

It is no wonder that we are in a global economic crisis—a crisis that even the economists don't know how to successfully address. The people on planet Earth are choosing to redefine God's rules, which will only lead to calamity. Remember, there are family, economic, and political consequences when we reject God.

Great theoretical preaching and teaching is necessary but is not sufficient to reverse the course of the cultures of the world. We need spiritual fathers and mothers who embrace a biblical worldview to disciple us in every area of life and to train us in how to bring the theory of a biblical worldview into practice.

What you need, indeed what we all need, is to repent, turn to Christ, be taught the Word of God, and be disciplined by spiritual fathers and mothers in how to live based on the Word.

It was a spiritual father who saw the potential in John and was willing to invest in training him. That was a stepping-stone enabling John to do what God created him to do. We all need spiritual mothers and fathers to do this for us as well. Ask the Lord to show you the spiritual fathers and mothers in your life. Submit to them, learn from them, and watch yourself grow and prosper in God's universe as you find and fulfill the purpose of God for your life.



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