

Doing What the Father Wants

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

There was a man who owned a vineyard. One morning he told his first son to go work in the vineyard that day. But his son felt lazy and wanted to sleep in, so he replied, “Awww, Dad, I don’t wanna.” A little later, however, he got up and went to the vineyard and worked.

The father also approached his second son and told him to go work in the vineyard that day. The second son replied in his best Eddie Haskell voice, “Yes, Sir, that is exactly what I’m gonna to do today.” But he didn’t mean it, and decided what he really wanted to do was have a root beer and watch cartoons all day. Which he did.

Which of the two did what his father wanted? If you answered, “The first,” you are absolutely right. The chief priests and Jewish elders gave the same answer when Jesus told this parable (minus the root beer and cartoons) in Matthew 21:28-31. And then Jesus nailed them to the wall: “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you **to show you the way of righteousness**, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did” (vv. 31-32).

Obviously, “the way of righteousness” Jesus is talking about...and the priests and elders are completely missing...is simply **doing what your Father wants**. Sounds simple enough, doesn’t it? But is it that simple for you? It isn’t for us. Sometimes we don’t know what the Father wants. And sometimes, even when we do know, we don’t do it. Are you like that too? Maybe it’s because we don’t really understand what our Father wants.

What Does the Father Want?

In Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, God had the writer make it clear that what we do will never make us right with God. *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God –*

not by works, so that no one can boast. However, he goes on in verse 10 to clarify *when* what we do comes into play. *For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Now with that established, let’s look at more of Ephesians, because it is chock full of what the Father wants of us. In fact, Ephesians 5:15-17 warns us: *Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity [to be imitators of God, (verse 1)], because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.*

Why don't we do what the Father wants?

Well...when you put it that way...it comes down to this: we either make it a point to discover what our Father wants us to do and do it, or we settle for being unwise and downright foolish people.

Most of the rest of Ephesians 5 is all about marriage. Interesting, huh? The Apostle Paul warns us not to be foolish but to understand what the Father wants, and a few verses later, he’s talking about how to live as married couples. He tells us to live lives of submission to one another. He describes how wives must respect their husbands by having an attitude of submission instead of an air of superiority. He instructs husbands to sacrificially love their wives like Christ loves the church. **This is what the Father wants in our marriage...in your marriage...that in everything we do, we show each other love and respect.**

If this were the only thing we knew the Father wanted, and we did it consistently, our marriages would be transformed, wouldn’t they? But there

is so much more. That’s why we need to be in God’s Word together regularly, so we’ll know how to walk “the way of righteousness” like Jesus said (Mt. 21:32).

But we don’t always do what the Father wants, do we? Why do you think that is?

Why Don't We Do What the Father Wants?

We have identified four reasons that are all too real in our lives.

1. We’re too lazy. We’re like the first son in Jesus’ parable. We’d rather sleep in. It’s too much trouble. It takes a lot of effort to treat our mates like we want to be treated. We’re too much like Don and Terri.

Every day, Don would walk in the door from work and head for the Lazyboy (appropriately named), the footrest lever the only exercise machine he wanted to even consider. Terri, who had been homeschooling three children most of the day, smoldered with resentment toward her husband. She made sure Don couldn’t be too lazy in his Lazyboy. She would fuss around him, straightening magazines that didn’t need straightening, shaking the dust cloth near enough to bring on a coughing spell, running the vacuum and “accidentally” bumping his chair, and sighing loudly...especially sighing loudly...over and over again. They were at a stand off. Don wasn’t loving Terri, and Terri wasn’t respecting Don. And they were both putting their marriage and family at risk.

They knew better. They knew what the Father wanted. They had read Ephesians 5 many times, but it was just too much trouble to expend the effort to treat each other like they themselves wanted to be treated. They each wanted the

What Father Wants (cont')

other one to go first. Now that's not only lazy, it's just plain dumb.

2. We're waiting to feel like it. We want to feel the Spirit move us with an overwhelming desire to obey. We shouldn't simply respond out of duty, should we? No, we have to be moved, or it isn't real. Right?

Wrong! This would be like you telling your son you want him to sweep out the garage while you're gone, that you expect to find a clean garage floor when you get back. Instead, you find the garage looking exactly the way it did before you left. That kid hadn't done a thing.

When you confront him with his disobedience, he shrugs his shoulders and offers his excuse. "Well, Dad, I just didn't feel like sweeping the floor today, and I thought it would be hypocritical of me to just do it out of duty. I even prayed that God would make me want to sweep the floor. I waited and waited, but the "want" didn't come. So I *couldn't* do what you wanted me to do. See?"

Would that work with you, Dad? It doesn't work with our heavenly Father either.

3. We're too self-absorbed. We're like the second son. We pretend to be righteous, but we end up doing what *we* want to do, not what the Father wants us to do. It's all about me!

We hear a lot these days about "my needs." "You are not meeting my needs." We talk with too many couples who really believe that God's deepest longing for their lives is that they be happy. And when their mate doesn't *make* them happy, they look for greener pastures. They are delusional! If the grass looks greener, it must be over a septic tank.

Philippians 2:3-4 is conclusive. This is what the Father wants: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.* Ouch! Surely God doesn't mean I should consider my husband...my wife...better than, more worthy than myself! That I should think of what he wants...what she wants... before what I want. But that's what He says. And He does mean it!

We don't believe that the Father can equip us to do what He wants.

4. We don't really believe the Father can equip us enough to do what He wants. Philippians 2 sounded too hard to put into practice, didn't it? Can God really make me – selfish ol' me – able to put my

mate before myself? The problem is that when something sounds too hard to succeed doing, we tend to give up without even trying. Or we give a half-hearted attempt and conclude that it sure enough is too hard, so God can't really mean that.

This is what God has to say about that: *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen* (Hebrews 13:20-21).

If God has enough power to raise Jesus from the dead, isn't that enough power to fully equip you and me to do His will? Isn't it enough power for Don and Terri to get out of their downward spiral of hurt and start putting each other first? Enough power to transform their whole relationship? Is God's power strong enough to change us? It must be. He says it is! So the only question that remains is...

How Can We Do What the Father Wants?

Paul prayed unceasingly for the Colossian believers, that they would experientially know the answer to this very question. In Colossians 1:9, he prays that God would fill them with the knowledge of His will by giving them spiritual wisdom and understanding.

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What Father Wants (cont')

Paul knew that if they had enough spiritual wisdom to understand what the Father wanted, they could “live a life worthy of the Lord” and could “please Him in every way.”

Paul then lists four specific ways they would live worthy lives for God:

1. They would continually be bearing fruit in every good work

(1:10). Good work like loving our mates even when they don't act loving in return. Good work like showing our children how to have loving relationships by obviously loving their Mom...loving their Dad...like Jesus loves. Good works like humbly putting each other's needs before our own. Behavior like that can't help but bear good fruit.

2. They would continually be growing in the knowledge of God

(v. 10). How do we get to know God better? By being in His Word regularly. And when we're in the Bible regularly *together*, we both are getting closer to Him and to each other.

3. They would continually be strengthened with God's power and might, even to the point of being able to have extraordinary patience and endurance

(v. 11). We can't simply decide on any given day to be strong, to never give into temptation, to never be discouraged, to never say an unkind word. We don't have that kind of strength on our own. But when Almighty God lives inside

us, we can do anything He calls us to do, even when life gets really tough. Even when we loose our job or face a life threatening disease. Even when our children go astray and abandon the faith.

4. They would continually be joyfully giving thanks to the Father

(v. 12). Grateful hearts don't happen accidentally, they have to be cultivated. When we refuse to allow ourselves to forget God's faithfulness and purposefully recall all the good things He has done, and is doing, for us, we are cultivating a grateful heart, not just in ourselves but in our children as well. And to quote Veggie Tale's great philosopher Madame Blueberry, “A grateful heart is a happy heart.”

They would be continually giving joyful thanks!

Sure, we can choose to be like the prophet Jeremiah when he set his mind to remember the bitterness and the gall, and sink into deep depression. Or we can choose to be like the prophet when he purposefully chose to remember that God's mercies were new every morning and it was by them he was even alive – and proclaim with him, “Great is Thy faithfulness!”

Cultivating a grateful heart can dramatically change your whole family!

If you want to “live a life worthy of the Lord” and “please Him in every way,” these are the characteristics you will display: your behavior will bless the people around you, especially your family; you'll spend the time to get to know God better; by tapping into God's power, you'll be patient with your spouse and kids, as well as with life's circumstances; and you'll cultivate a grateful heart. Living out these characteristics is how you will do what the Father wants.

We have a choice every day to be like son #1 or son #2. And some days we have to make the choice minute by minute because we really *do not feel* like doing what we know our Father wants. We want to sit back, drink root beer and watch cartoons so bad we can taste it. But when we **choose to obey whether we feel like it or not**, that's when Jesus says we are walking the way of righteousness in the kingdom of God. We will be doing what the Father wants.

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