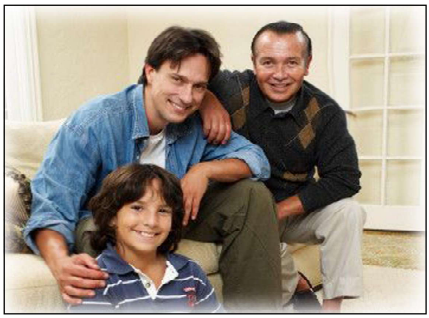
Ministering as a husband, father and grandfather

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One of life's greatest mysteries is how the boy who wasn't good enough to marry your daughter can be the father of the smartest grandchild in the world - Jewish proverb

The crisis of marriage

A crisis came on Western nations during the Twentieth Century in the form of shocking rates of separation and divorce. This occurred as societies forgot God's purpose for marriage, and forsook the virtue of commitment. The problem was compounded as legal changes deprived marriage of protection. In Australia the *Family Law Act (1975)* eroded matrimony by enabling any marriage to be dissolved by one partner, regardless of the views of the other. Marriage then became a disposable commodity, and the annual number of divorces soon quadrupled. Recognition of cohabitation ("de-facto marriage") and acceptance of same-sex relationships also undermined the historic male role of *husband* - literally one who is covenanted or *bound* to the *house*.

The challenges facing fathers

The role of men as fathers has been eroded since about the 1970s. Around that time, fathers lost any role to protect their unborn offspring, as mothers only retained the lawful ability to decide to keep or to abort the child. The unborn in Western nations became effectively fatherless. The problem continued as society rejected corporal discipline, which is often administered by fathers.

The crisis of grandfathering

Our society is rapidly forgetting to transmit values and share the wisdom of the ages. Spiritual and cultural wisdom held by older men is shunned by a society that is so oriented towards the future that the past is viewed as irrelevant. In fact the swifter the pace of change, the more we have to be anchored in the unchanging wisdom that sustained the former generations - in situations much tougher than are faced today.

Ministry as a husband

God's purpose for husbands can be realised through gaining awareness of how marriage has prophetic potential. Martrimony gives testimony to the LORD with his people (in old covenant times) and to our Lord Jesus in union with the church (in the era of the new covenant). So good husbands are prophetic when they signify the sacred marriage, reflecting that union by learning from the example set by God who gave himself in service of his bride.

In Old Testament times, the prophets described God faithfully loving Israel as her husband, while in the New Testament era a similar parallel in relation to Jesus and his Bride:

> *Then the LORD said to me, "Go show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites* (Hosea 3:1).
>
> *For you maker is your husband - the LORD Almighty is his name .... The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit. ... as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you* (Isaiah 54:5-6; 62:5).
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> *... I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you .... I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. I adorned you with jewellery .... the splendour I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the sovereign LORD* (Ezekiel 16:5-14).
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> *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her .... In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives .... This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church* (Ephesians 5:23-32).
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> *I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him* (II Corinthians 11:2).
>
> *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband ....* (Revelation 21:2).

Ministry as a father

God's purpose for fathers can be achieved as men gain awareness of its prophetic possibility. Earthly fatherhood was created so that the raising of children would exemplify God as the heavenly Father of godly offspring. Fathers are prophetic when they testify to God's fatherhood by heeding his example. Fathers should lovingly train and discipline their children, and should speak to them (as Jesus spoke to us) about our heavenly Father, setting an example of his character, and preparing his children for eternity:

... before your very eyes ... you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son (Deuteronomy 1:31).

My son, do not despise the LORD'S discipline
and do not resent his rebuke,
because the LORD disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in (Proverbs 3:11-12).

As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him ... (Psalm 103:14).

"I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him (Malachi 3:17).

" ... your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you ....
" ... your Father knows what you need ....
" ... your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
" ... your heavenly Father feeds them [the birds]. *Are you not much more valuable ...?* (Matthew 6:4, 8, 14, 26).

"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (7:9-11).

He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him .... "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate .... (Luke 15:20-23).

Fathers do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

Ministry as a grandfather

Older men are to be encouraged to rediscover and transmit spiritual wisdom, as custodians who confer a life-giving legacy (not just a financial blessing) upon future generations - in accordance with Proverbs 13:22:

> *A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children ....*

The inheritance is ideally one of wisdom for each individual, family, church, local community and nation. But beyond endowing such a legacy in a passive manner is the importance of tactfully issuing directions, as God's covenant with one person has consequences for offspring:

> *Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come .... Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation .... I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just ...."* (Genesis 17:9-10; 18:19).
>
> *... tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed by signs among them ...* (Exodus 10:2).

So men should give persistent directions to their children and grandchildren - without causing exasperation! This could involve buying a handsome Bible, as *a gift that opens the way for the giver* (Proverbs 18:16) and writing in it a short testimony, asking forgiveness and that the recipient not hold against God the failings of earthly fathers. Given on a special occasion, the day may come when the request it contains will be heeded, according to a biblical ideal:

> *I will utter hidden thing, things from of old - what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, we will tell the next generation ....*
>
> *He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God* (Psalm 78:2-7).

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