

Noble Subjects

A Fathering Paradox

I still remember the first time I went shooting with my son. It was quite intimidating because he is a marksman, he is highly regarded at the shooting range and is vastly beloved at all the gun shops in town.

When he was in the Sheriff's Academy, things went really wrong with the training. Three weeks from graduation, a third of his class had not yet qualified on hand guns. He and a buddy rounded up the ones who were struggling and worked with them on their own time teaching them to shoot. Every single one qualified and was graduated.

In addition to his formidable knowledge of firearms, his leadership ability was emerging strong and clear, as someone who was trusted when he had no "authority" - only the legitimacy of a committed life giver.

Against that backdrop, my going shooting with him was a challenging proposition. I have a long and unfortunate history of using words as a weapon but limited experience with gun powder and lead.

My objectives going in were threefold:

- Don't wound anyone.
- Don't embarrass my son in front of his buddies.
- Earn some points for heroically doing a father/son activity in HIS world.

We arrived at the shooting range, and he was mobbed by the locals. It took 45 minutes for him to do the social thing, speaking about sundry weapons with a complex jargon which I knew none of and with terms of endearment usually reserved for a woman.

Eventually after I had sprung for the day's supply of ammo, we went into the range.

I frantically scoured my mental file from the prior safety lesson with him, then stepped up to the line with his pistol in my hand and five rounds in the magazine.

He coached me on foot positioning, scolded me for the condition of my desk-shoulders and sighed at what a muddle I was making trying to wrap my crippled hand around the pistol.



Eventually I took a deep breath and held it while I eased off the safety and fired my first round, then flinched as the empty shell ricocheted off the stall wall next to me. Four rounds later he reeled in the target and stared in disbelief at the neatly clustered collection of holes.

I beat him to the punch and said, "Beginner's luck."

He affirmed my judgment, ran the target out, and stepped up to the line to show me how it's really done. Five shots off in quick succession netted a neater cluster than mine but not by much.

I breathed a sigh of relief that so far I had achieved objectives one and two reasonably well.

We took turns making his pistols go 'bang' while poking ragged holes in a piece of paper with my money. He was having fun. I was earning points. Near the end of our father/son activity on HIS turf, I realized to my amazement that I was actually starting to enjoy this, not just endure it. That startled me so I began to reverse engineer what was going on.

What exactly is compelling about using my money to poke holes in a piece of paper?

I wondered about the excellence factor. While I was no competition for MISTER Marksman himself, I really was shooting vastly better than any half blind rookie has a right to. Was that bringing me pleasure?

Didn't seem to be. The cost of lead certainly muted any pleasure I got out of poking holes in paper from a distance.

Finally I realized it had to do with the fact that those aforementioned expensive holes actually represented me.

It was a weird thought. And I should care that I can accidentally shoot better than most people do intentionally? That just isn't my world.

Then I understood that the issue was not how good or bad I was, but that there was no erosion between my competence (high or low) and the report card. There was a one to one correlation.

And that uncorked a huge vat of toxic emotions over all the times when my competence (high or low) was seen through the grid of someone else's implementation or failure to follow through.

Try to sit on my side of the desk for a moment. Last week we finished up Lesson Four in the Prophet series for Sapphire Training Center. I think it is stunningly powerful. The concepts in Lesson Four have the ability to unleash thousands of people from one particular area of bondage. It is easily the best teaching I have produced so far this year.



However, the transformational power of the teaching is subject to your implementation. Or not. If I write a great lesson but you listen to the videos and do none of the homework or read the homework but don't visit any of the painful exercises I gave, your life will be minimally transformed, and I will not look as good as the lesson I wrote.

I do a great business evaluation and lay out solid strategies for the entrepreneur. But if he does not implement them, no one will ever be able to see that I did a good job.

Or make it deliverance. Or a sermon. Or an article on the blog. Or a prayer strategy for inner healing. Or a strategy for taking a city.

Almost everything that I do is only SEEN to be as good as the other person's implementation.

I didn't realize that this was bugging me so badly, but it was. I understood that day why I still occasionally had some longings for the plumbing trade, which I heartily loathed 99% of the time. When I installed something, it was visibly good and the customer could not influence the quality of my work by any inaction on his part.

And finally, with a pistol and some lead, I could poke holes in a piece of paper, and those holes accurately represented me for a change.

Bizarre.

I did a lot of work around that issue, back then. I framed it as a legitimacy wound. I "knew" I should get my legitimacy from the fact God loved me, not that I did a good job. And anyway, He knows exactly how good anything I do is regardless of whether anyone implements or not. So what is the big deal, right?

I thought I had beaten that into the ground, but I recently caught the miscreant running around in a new set of clothes. He was disguised as "getting a good ROI for the King."

Sounds really spiritual. It is what a Noble Subject of the Great King should have as his value system.

Or not.

Behind that sound logic, the same old virus was working away. I looked at you with a question in my mind: will you implement? And if I think you won't, my motivation to invest in you drops like a rock.

Ostensibly, that was because I want the King to get a really great return on the investments I make. But in reality I just don't like you making me look less than I am.



I sighed.

Do we HAVE to go around this wretched mountain again? How many bazillion legitimacy battles do I have to fight before I am at peace with being loved - so at peace that I don't care if you make me look bad by your underperformance?

I'm a fighter, and I know the Christian walk is not all about resting in Him, but I gotta tell you - I live for variety. Fighting the same old battle again and again is not my idea of a good time.

I was stuck there for about three months. I still absolutely am fiercely protective of my time. I want each day to count. I want what I do to be seed sown on good ground.

But . . . And it was a big "but," because I think legitimacy is a pretty big deal - and mine was suspect.

Three days ago, Father blindsided me and completely reframed the battle.

I was doing some audio editing for the set of Blessings for Brides. Gotta tell you.

Boring.

There are few things that I find as uninspiring as listening to me. The first time out of my mouth, I am occasionally impressed with what I hear, but old manna? Not my deal.

I was in a semi-vegetative state, listening to the guy on the computer drone on and on and on, trying to stay engaged enough to make some notes and catch some bloopers, while eating a totally inappropriate amount of comfort foods.

That particular day, I was listening to one of the prayers for the brides when they were in the womb. I was describing the father's emotional engagement with a child. On the one hand, his wife gets all the credit for this building project, but on the other hand, dad has contributed half of the blueprint.

Yeah, yeah. Old stuff.

Then THE Father spoke to me.



"Babies are the most important building project most fathers will ever engage in."

I agreed, cautiously. Self-evident statements are usually loaded - especially when God makes them.

"And a father contributes 50% of the raw materials for this project, so he has a very high vested interest in the outcome."

I had to agree, but I already knew I was walking step by step into a trap. I had just said that on the CD. I was not arguing with God, but I knew that by agreeing I was going to get myself in trouble. But what can a guy do with a lawyer as canny as God . . . ?

"What a father contributes might affect hair and eye color, size, weight, laterality, athletic ability, soul preferences and of course the nature and calling of the baby's spirit. The father's contribution makes a massive difference to the quality of life of this child."

"Yes, Lord." (I just said that on the CD! Where is this going?)

"So Arthur, you are in agreement that a father should be hugely vested in the building project we call a baby, since he has contributed around 10,000 of his very own genes and some chromosomes, but only about half of those will be used in the project. And the way those genes and chromosomes are assembled will have incalculable consequences for that baby of his. The slightest substitution of this gene for that one not only can, but WILL, in most cases affect the lives of hundreds of people over several generations. The way the project is executed is incredibly important, right?"

Of course it is right. And I still KNOW this is a trap, but can't for the life of me figure out what I am walking into. But in about three seconds this bear trap is going to close around both my ankles.

"Arthur, did you notice that even though the project is priceless, and the father invested rare treasures, and the implications of the building process are infinite, the father has no control at all over how it comes together. He has to trust Me."

SNAP!

I was totally busted.

It was not all about legitimacy. A bunch of this had to do with faith. Could I trust God to look after the investments I made in the people He sent me to?



Could I trust God to care as much about my treasures as I do?

Could I trust the King to be vastly creative in using the fruit of my hard work and not just let it be wasted by some mindless bureaucrat?

Could I trust Him to do it all out of my sight - not allowing me the comfort of seeing the process unfold? Could I go months or years without knowing what He did with what I invested in the people He sent me to?

Gulp!

You wanted something new to work on Arthur?

Well, get to work!

By Arthur Burk
From the Quarterdeck, in Anaheim

