

Hope for Disappointed Fathers

As I began to introduce *Joseph's Workshop* to men, Many fathers have told me their sons have not followed them in their faith journey.

They express guilt, puzzlement and fatherly self-accusation. "What did I do wrong? How could I possibly help others with the same problem if I couldn't help my own children?"

Many of their sons have dropped out. Some of them won't even talk with their puzzled, disappointed fathers about anything faith related.

Typically, these fathers had tried and failed to get their sons to accept prayer, faith-based schooling and church attendance. After a certain age their sons turned it all off.

Unaddressed, this feeling of personal failure is a potential impediment preventing some men from coming forward to participate.

Is this you? We need you! Perfection is not the goal.

We aren't searching for 'perfect' fathers – fathers who have done everything right. We need men who have seen and lived these problems and have gained the experience to help others confront them.

Wisdom does not come from knowledge. It comes from experience. Much of our own experience comes from reflecting on past failure.

St. Peter made many 'wrong turns', not unlike our own past errors in raising our kids.* Even so, Jesus put Peter in charge of His whole

* **St. Peter's early path:** "Get behind me Satan. You do not have in mind the concerns of God..." (Mark 8:33); "... before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." (Mark 14:30); "Lord, are you going to wash my feet? ... You shall never wash my feet." (John 13:6,8); ""Let us make three shelters, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah" (He did not know what he was saying.)" (Luke 9:33); "But when he saw the strong wind he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30)

Church![†] Those stumbles, once acknowledged, corrected and forgiven, led St. Peter to a deeper spiritual relationship and understanding of the Lord. Why can't we work toward the same?

Jesus didn't work with men who claimed perfection – like the Pharisees. Jesus worked with imperfect people – self-acknowledged sinners. It was they who made the difference and carried his beatific message to the world. That message civilized a very barbaric world.

Years ago, one of the early scientists who was trying to understand how machines might learn said that we humans seem to learn best and fastest by making a few mistakes[‡]. No mistakes at all leads to very little learning; too many can lead to disaster and defeat. But somewhere in between is an optimal amount of failure.

Failure properly encountered can heal and prevent future failure.

There is Hope.

Our own failures, recognized and admitted, have the potential to change our lives and the lives of the next generations of children.

We will need to work with fathers to:

- Encourage them to take advantage of past experiences and apply them to help other fathers help their sons.
- Let them know they are in good company. Many others have stumbled on similar poorly lighted paths.
- Appreciate that today's children are faced with evils most of us never had to deal with. Everything in kids' lives has changed and is still fluctuating. Many fathers were unaware of the tsunami of tech, social media, medical, developmental, psychological,

[†] "... you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18)

[‡] Prof. Marvin Minsky, working on Artificial Intelligence at M.I.T., about 60 years ago.

educational and other potential evils their kids were up against until it was too late to guide them.

- Support them with the knowledge and hope that there is help, where the spirit of Faith is up against the evils of a decaying culture.
- Prepare them to offer a kind of ‘spiritual adoption’ of other fathers and their kids; working for those children’s salvation as a way to atone for some of our own loss.

We must pray for the ‘lost’ kids; learn what went wrong; and help other fathers for whom it is not too late to step in.

The goal is to prepare more fathers to lead their sons to grow in faith, wisdom and holiness to become strong men who are leaders in their families and their society.