

In the absence of Nehemiah's godly leadership, the spiritual resurrection of the returned remnant rapidly degenerated into a spiritual stupor that manifested itself in empty ritual and mere lip service. So far gone were their spiritual senses that while continuing to break God's law, they wondered why God had withdrawn His blessings. Contrary to their human reasoning, the lack of God's blessings was not due to God's lack of love for them; in truth, it was due to His great love for them that He desired to get their attention so He could draw them back to Him. Security and blessings are consequences of honoring and obeying the Father. Yet God's people had become so indifferent to God's law that even when God rebuked them, they responded in defense with: "How have we despised Your name?" "How have we profaned the covenant?" "How have we robbed God?" "How have we wearied Him?"

God's reply to their last question clearly reveals their corrupted perspective as He points out: "In that you say, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord and He delights in them...'" (Mal. 2:17).

With the people assuming that their relationship with God was secure because of their privileged heritage, God had to send a messenger to address their false sense of security. That messenger was Malachi, which means messenger of Yahweh. To him God imparted His rebuke: "A son honors his father ... Then if I am a father, where is My honor?' ... 'I am not pleased with you,' says the Lord of hosts, 'nor will I accept an offering from you'" (Mal. 1:6,10). But even in their great wickedness, because of God's merciful love for His people, He extended His grace to them. If they would but humbly repent and sincerely honor Him, then He would restore them to righteousness. "Return to Me, and I will return to you" (Mal. 3:7).

Last words are always significant, but none so significant and profound as those in Malachi 4:4-6 which bear God's last utterance to His people until the prophetic coming of "the Lord whom you seek" as the "refiner and purifier" some 400 years later. "Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him ... Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse."

Then as promised, four hundred years later, the New Testament begins with, "And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17).

How do we prepare our children for the Lord? Is it enough just to keep our children out of the paths of sinners and out of the seats of scoffers? Is it enough to start the day with a Bible verse followed by a "Christian" curriculum? Is it enough that we homeschool them? Do we live in a false sense of security because of the rituals we perform?

After all, the Israelites made all the necessary sacrifices, and the Pharisees fasted and prayed. Yet in spite of all their external rituals, the forerunner of Christ, whose purpose was to make ready a people prepared for the Lord, condemned their sacrifices saying, "You brood of vipers ... Therefore bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And also the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:7-9). Jesus reiterated this truth when He said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will

enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father" (Matt. 7:21).

Homeschooling is a step of faith by God's people to return to His command, as fathers are turning their hearts back to their children, to diligently teach their children God's Word so as to prepare a people for the Lord. And by taking that step in faith, God has richly blessed us by allowing us an unequalled opportunity to diligently study His Word that we may present to Him a heart of wisdom, and that we may diligently teach this wisdom to our children when we sit in our house, when we walk by the way, and when we lie down, and when we rise up (Deut. 6:7). And although our generation has been ill prepared to lead their children, God is blessing that step of faith and preparing a people for the Lord by restoring the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

To be sure, breaking fallow ground after such a lengthy period of neglect is difficult, but God has already charted the course if we but learn His ways; our responsibility is to study His Word, which furnishes us clear directions. And there is no question, upon closer examination, that God clearly called the fathers of each household to lead, to teach God's Word, to protect, and to love. Moreover, women were created to be suitable helpmates to their husbands for this formidable task, while children were to follow in their father's footsteps, heed their father's instructions, obey their father's commands, and be about their father's business, all while honoring their parents in all they do.

Not surprisingly, Jesus' entire life sets the example for Christians to follow. Let us first look at what Luke says about His childhood. In Luke 2:40 we read that "the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." Then when Jesus was twelve, Luke notes that after looking for Him in Jerusalem after the Passover, his parents "found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them, and asking questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers" (Luke 2:46,47). When his mother told Him how anxiously they had looked for Him, He replied, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). Luke then ends the facts about His early life by saying that "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52).

For some, this account may seem somewhat incomplete, yet upon closer examination, really, what more needs to be said! Jesus was with His Father. Jesus was about His Father's business, and He kept increasing in wisdom. When a child spends his time with his father and is busy with his father's business, it is inevitable that he will increase in wisdom.

Even as a man, even as our Lord and Saviour, Jesus came to do the will of His Father which He summed up in John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work." This is so clearly illustrated towards the end of His life when Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, "Father ... I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do.... I manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou gavest Me ... for the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to them ... While I was with them, I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; and I guarded them ... I have given them Thy word ... I have made Thy name known to them" (John 17). Was there ever a more humble, precious testimony of Jesus' submission to His Father?

God has carefully designed a marvelous plan for our families if we but submit to His will. On the other hand, we must also realize that the enemy has carefully devised a plan to keep us from doing the will of the Father, cleverly using every lie and temptation he can think of to lure us off God's course. For he knows that it isn't so much that we start the race but how we finish. Amazingly, many men of the Bible started the race but ended blown off course, running it for

themselves instead of for God. So let us encourage each other to run the race with endurance.

Whereas life is short, the enemy wants us to believe that we have all the time in the world. Although life is serious business, the enemy wants us to think that it is all fun and games. Our purpose is to do the will of the Father, yet the enemy wants us to believe that we deserve to live our lives the way we desire. Unfortunately, none of us are immune to the wiles of the enemy and his propaganda. Even if we begin in the right direction, he will continue to work on us until we grow weary and subsequently let down our guard, so he can try to alter our course. Little by little he works, so little in fact, that sometimes we don't even realize that he has us headed in a 180-degree turn from where we started.

Often others can see glaring discrepancies between the outcomes we want for our children's lives and the course we are running, unbeknownst to us because of the spiritual stupor we get into, like the remnant in Malachi. Let us, therefore, be careful not to trust in the external act of homeschooling as our lifeboat. We cannot ask God to save us and then go about our own business; we must be about our Father's business. And as parents, we must diligently make sure that our children are about their father's/Father's business, as well. This takes clear vision, careful planning, and a determination to stay true to our calling and path. We must spend our time wisely in preparing our children for the roles to which God has called them.

Jesus again clearly shows us by Word and example in John 5:19,20 when He said, "Truly, Truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing..."

Recently a friend asked me to bring Jedidiah over to their house the next time I came because her son would love to visit with him. I explained that once Jon came home from work, except for Jon's and my quiet time together each evening, Jedidiah and he were inseparable. Jedidiah, and now Josiah, follow Jon wherever he goes and do whatever he does.

To show the significance of this diligent mentoring, by age eleven and twelve, Jedidiah knew how to roof, drywall, paint, pour concrete, build fences, build a host of other structures, do some plumbing and some electrical work, use power tools, refinish floors, build decks, build rock walls, put in fishponds, set gates and doors, change tires, oil, and fuel pumps, and many other things, all by being about his father's business.

We are continually having him practice his shooting and archery skills and are now teaching him orienteering and battle strategy to be prepared if he is ever needed to protect our family or our country. He also follows our rigorous reading plan of the Bible and biographies of godly men. And so he will be able to teach his own family God's precepts, we are having him prepare his own Bible lesson plans and practice on us, as well.

For years Jedidiah has wanted us to start a lawn care business, but Jon thought he wasn't quite old enough, yet he encouraged him to save his money from a few neighbors' lawns in preparation for the time we would start this business. Last year, Jon bought a weed eater and hedge trimmer that Jedidiah and Sonia paid for with the first big job they had. Now that Jedidiah turned 13 this year, Jon felt he was old enough to handle a large lawnmower, so the children pooled their money with ours to purchase a used professional model. Consequently, we have begun "Summers In the Garden Lawn Care," which will eventually become a landscaping business as well, since the children have had a lot of practice putting in our own flower beds, fishponds, and potted flower gardens for our deck in the country. However, Jedidiah and Sonia will not be working independently for themselves, but for the family, as is their responsibility.

Even when Jon is not home, the children are doing the will of their father by being obedient

to me, diligently learning their lessons, and completing tasks he requests of them. He then holds them accountable when he gets home from work.

The past several weeks, Jedidiah has spent the afternoon using a jackhammer to break up our concrete basement floor. Once finished, he and Josiah helped Jon dig up our sewer pipe inside and outside, replace the sewer line, fill in the hole, and pour concrete to replace the basement floor. They just repaired the garage roof that had caved in, and they are now beginning to replace our front porch. It is such a blessing for me to see our sons work right along with Jon and quite amazing to see all that they are able to accomplish, all because their father keeps them about his business. Don't ever think your boys, or even your girls, are too young to learn.

Similarly, our daughter is about her father's business—serving him as I do by greeting him at the door when he arrives home from work, listening to him as he shares his day, taking off his boots, getting him something to drink, rubbing his feet, back and shoulders, helping me prepare his dinner, helping serve him at the dinner table, baking goodies for him, making his lunches and including notes in his lunch box, sewing buttons on his shirts, doing his laundry, reading to him, rubbing him before he retires, helping me clean the house and decorate it to make it lovely, planting beautiful gardens and making beautiful arrangements—basically doing everything she can to serve her father and his family.

I am diligent in teaching Sonia all I know about gourmet cooking, baking, laundering and garment care, decorating a lovely home, purchasing quality decorations, planning wonderful family celebrations and lovely dinner parties, gardening, landscaping, and teaching children. There is nothing more important for a woman than being a godly helpmate to her husband by making a lovely home for him and his family and diligently studying God's Word so she can be a spiritual helpmate as well; therefore, I am deeply determined to pass on my passion for both. My blessing comes from Jon as he constantly thanks me for being his wife. "An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Prov. 31:10-12). As ladies, this is our calling and should be our foremost goal for our own daughters.

At night, the children listen to Jon and I read and discuss God's Word, biographies, and apologetics. We almost always play games and read other books for fun, too, but our delight is in the law of the Lord, and in it we meditate day and night.

In order to dispel any notion that our lives are perfect, let me say that we did not start out doing all these things at once. Jon wasn't even saved until a year after we were married. And although his conversion was miraculous, in that it was no longer he who lived within him but Christ, for he truly became a new man, it did not miraculously get us to where we are today. We reached this stage of the race in lengths, stride by stride.

Though Jon and I had no prior guidance in raising our children according to God's Word, our desire was to do God's will; therefore, we spent a tremendous amount of time earnestly studying His Word. And as promised in His Word that those who seek Him shall find Him, as we sought Him, He faithfully revealed His will to us and led us step by step into His way. "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

God set the example when He walked with Adam in the garden; when He commanded His sons to diligently teach their children when they sit in their house, when they walk by the way, when they lie down, and when they rise up; and finally through His Son who came to do the will of His Father. The Hebrew forefathers understood that their greatest commission was to train up a child in the way he should go, for they were training and equipping their children to serve God,

not only in this life, but also in the eternal life hereafter. They understood that God uses families to transform society. This is far different from man's reasoning today, which removes the family from the children altogether and makes children creatures of the state. How ironic that even our "Father's House" today separates sons and daughters from their fathers and their father's business. How symbolic of the church's spiritual condition. Remember, God says that we must remember His law, and the fathers' hearts must be restored to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers lest He come and smite the land with a curse.

What God Says about Work

Growing up in a family who regarded work as a duty and a privilege and whose parents enjoyed working and serving others, I just naturally desired to become a part of the family enterprise and share in their enjoyment. I loved serving my dad and mom, helping in our home and in our family business in any way I could, yet it was not until I became intimate with my Heavenly Father that I realized God's purpose for my life and His marvelous design for family members and each of their roles. Then as I combined my biblical understanding with my historical research of other people and their cultures, I came to the realization that how people view their gods forms their thinking and their values, which in turn affects how they view work and their roles, subsequently affecting their entire social structure, and consequently, the quality of their lives. For we all become like the god whom we revere.

What does the Bible say about the God whom we serve? "For in six days the one True God, the Lord, my Lord, made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them" (Ex. 20:11). "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). "His work is perfect" (Deut. 32:4). "All His work is done in faithfulness" (Ps. 33:4). "O Lord, how many are Thy works! In wisdom Thou hast made them all" (Ps. 104:24). "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Ps. 19:1). "And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua ... who had seen all the great work of the Lord which He had done for Israel" (Judg. 2:7).

God's work was perfect in every way, reflecting His glory, wisdom, and faithfulness to His people. His great works continued through His Son, for Jesus said, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working" (John 5:17). And He continues even now through the power of His Holy Spirit, which He places in each of His children. "... God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power" (Eph. 3:7).

Unlike other cultures whose people despised work and even held their laborers and oftentimes their women in contempt, the Hebrews viewed work as a duty and a blessing, regarding even the lowliest of positions with dignity and honor. Why? Because while all other gods lived for ease, pleasure, and debauchery, the Hebrews' God, our very own, created work, ordained work, mandated work, honored work, blessed work, Himself worked, and, even now, perpetually works in the lives of His creations. So whereas virtually all other cultures abhorred manual labor and their laborers, the children of God highly esteemed work and even the lowliest of workers. Again, because they spent time with their Father, they knew Him and became like Him.

How can we become like our God? David charges his son Solomon to know the God of his father and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind (1 Chron. 28:9). He himself continued to meditate on God's great deeds and declare them to others, exhorting each of us to do the same. "I will meditate on all Thy work ... What god is great like our God?" (Ps. 77:12,13). "Great are the works of the Lord; they are studied by all who delight in them. Splendid and majestic is His work ... He has made His wonders to be remembered" (Ps. 111:2-4). "On the glorious splendor of Thy majesty, and on Thy wonderful works, I will meditate" (Ps. 145:5). "How awesome are Thy works! ... Come and see the works of God, who is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men" (Ps. 66:3,5). "... declare the work of God ... consider what He has done" (Ps. 64:9).

We must consider all God has done. We must meditate on His entire Word. We must declare the work and truth of God.

From Shepherd to King

Although men look upon outward appearances, God always looks upon the heart. Men revere riches and honor, whereas God reveres a humble heart. Men desire glory and honor; yet only God deserves glory and honor. God's ways are not men's ways.

Contrary to our way of thinking, God has always used seemingly ordinary men for extraordinary jobs. Consider Noah who built the first ocean liner, yet we are not told of any great position that he held—only that he was a righteous man, blameless in his time, and that he walked with God (Gen. 6:9) and in reverence built an ark (Heb. 11:7). Jacob who bore the sons of the future twelve tribes was just a lowly shepherd, as was Moses who led God's children out of Israel, and David who became the greatest king who ever lived. Nehemiah who rebuilt Jerusalem's walls was a cupbearer to the king; Elisha was a plowman; and Amos was a herdsman and grower of sycamore figs. God's very own Son was a carpenter; the great apostles were fishermen; and Paul was a tentmaker.

Contrary to the Western world's widely held belief that only those who have a college degree will ever be successful, God chooses men not based on their degrees, but for their submissive heart and devotion to Him.

God chose Noah because he was righteous and blameless and walked with his Lord (Gen. 6:9). And this was important because God needed a man who would be obedient regardless of the circumstances. To think that Noah had never seen rain and yet God warned him of a great flood to come and asked him to build a boat with dimensions that were inconceivable at that time in history was pretty amazing. And furthermore, to realize that it took 120 years to construct, all while men and women continued to laugh and scorn him—now that is running the race with endurance! And it is said that Noah did according to all that God had commanded him (Gen. 6:22; 7:5).

How could any man bear such ridicule? Hebrews 11:7 says, "By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark." Each of these men revered God and therefore trusted Him to empower them to fulfill the tasks He had called them to undertake, regardless of the difficulty.

Consider, too, that not only does the Word of God use “work” over 600 times and mentions over 200 different occupations, God begins His Word working and commanding His first children to do the same. For after God created the first man, He placed him in a garden and commanded him to cultivate and keep it. Then He saw that “there was not found a helper suitable for him” (Gen. 2:20). A helper to do what? To help man complete the work God had called him to do. So God created woman.

While Adam and Eve were the first caretakers of the land, the majority of people since have cultivated and kept the land, working to provide food, shelter, clothing, and other necessities for living. Each family therefore worked together as a unit for the welfare of the entire family, which in turn helped bond the family together and subsequently brought harmony to them. Unfortunately in our own country with the advance of the Industrial Revolution, families no longer needed to live and work together for their sustenance, and this, combined with the lure for bigger and better things coupled with the propaganda of the media and public education, drastically changed the makeup of the family, which once worked together to provide the help, support, guidance, and encouragement that was so common here. How sad, yet now we are witnessing many homeschooling families returning to God’s original design for families, which greatly blesses our hearts.

Recently a father told Jon, “Surely you don’t want Jedidiah to work as hard as you do, Jon. I certainly do not want my sons to work as hard as I do.”

Jon replied, “Why? Work is mandated and blessed by God. Hard work builds character. I not only desire that my sons work hard, but I expect them to work hard all their lives.”

Unfortunately, many fathers hope that their sons don’t have to work as hard as they do or did as kids. However, that is not in agreement with what God says about work, nor is that in alignment with God’s example set by Himself and His Son.

It would be wise for each of us to examine our minds and hearts to see what perception we have of our God. We also need to consider how we really view work, how we view our purpose on this earth, and how we view each of our roles. From this we need to determine if our thinking is in alignment with God’s desire for our lives and then make the necessary changes to ensure that our children are headed in the right direction. Are we about our Father’s business?

God doesn’t say that we should do our work in five days and play the other two. He says, “Six days you should labor and do all your work” (Ex. 20:9). Then God not only blesses the work of our hands but He makes the work joyful. “After you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat; and you shall rejoice in your feast ... you shall celebrate a feast to the Lord your God ... because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful” (Deut. 16:13-15).

Who are we working for: God or ourselves? “We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work” (John 9:4). “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). “Do all thing without grumbling or disputing” (Phil. 2:14). “Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work” (Col 1:10). “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve” (Col. 3:23,24). “... useful to the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21). “... establish you in every good work” (2 Thes. 2:17).

God condemns idleness and especially those who do not provide for their own household. “The desire of the sluggard puts him to death, for his hands refuse to work; all day long he is

craving, while the righteous gives and does not hold back" (Prov. 21:25,26). "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat" (2 Thes. 3:10). "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). The wicked "do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord, nor do they consider the work of His hands. Therefore My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge; and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude is parched with thirst" (Is. 5:12,13).

Not so for the righteous who are about their Father's work. For God rewards the work of His people. "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary" (Gal. 6:9). "For Thou dost recompense a man according to his work" (Ps. 62:12). "Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established" (Prov. 16:3). "Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings" (Prov. 22:29). "Each man's work will become evident ... because it is to be revealed with fire ... If any man's work ... remains, he shall receive a reward" (1 Cor. 3:13,14).

Finally, let us remember that we are God's fellow workers (1 Cor. 3:9). So "let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). No matter where we are, we should continue to witness to those around us and to disciple those who seek His truth.