

Father, Come Home . . . And Change The World!

Over the last decade or so hundreds of thousands of Christian families have begun a process of returning home. The choice is registered most visibly in the choice to homeschool the children. But this choice almost always includes another: the mother does not work outside the home. Her work becomes very much home-centered. Then, as the homeschooling process unfolds year by year, most families have discovered that just having Mom and the children at home is not enough. Dad must also “come home” in the sense that he must reclaim his responsibilities and privileges as head of the family if the renewal his family has begun to enjoy is to prosper. The homeschooling movement has had the salutary effect of turning the hearts of each member of the family back to the home.

This “family renaissance” is most welcome in a day when the home has become, even among Christians, a combination fast-food restaurant, transportation hub, and motel. Surely it is a wholesome development when families begin to take back responsibility for areas of life which God gave to them but which they have abandoned to other institutions over the years. And so not only have we seen education coming home; we have also witnessed a renewed interest in families taking charge of health decisions, caring for elderly relatives, and becoming self-sufficient in food, clothing, and shelter. Beyond this, many men are talking openly of their desire to come home in the sense of establishing a home-based business that would allow them to be closer to their families and would allow their children to follow them in a self-sufficient lifestyle. Some have even come to express open admiration for the simple, family-centered lifestyle of the Amish (without embracing their theological perspective). Surely this turning of the hearts of fathers to the home is to be lauded—or is it?

Is Being Home-centered a Form of Effeminate Abdication?

One esteemed brother and Christian writer recently scolded the Christian “masculine renewal movement” for actually being a quiet adoption of feminism! He refers to “the ‘neo-Amish’ home-centered reaction to modernity” in which “[t]he woman’s perspective on the home and family is accepted as normative and binding on all members of the family. Because she is home-centered, so must everyone else be.... But among many traditionalist Christians, the women have decided that the men must come home too. And so the men have, meekly submitting once again. But as the men adopt the home-centered vision which God intended only for wives, they have in fact betrayed their wives” [his emphasis].

He goes on to show that the Bible presents godly men who have vocations

outside the home and which cannot be carried out at home (soldier, city treasurer, etc.). The model for manhood is the husband of the Proverbs 31 woman who “is where he is supposed to be, away from home, sitting in the gates with the elders of the city (v. 23)” [his emphasis].

He reaches his conclusion when he states that “those men who have accepted the home-centered vision deserve the strongest rebuke—not because of their traditionalist masculinity, but for just the opposite problem, that of effeminate abdication.... Neither should we praise those men who go home to try to give their children two mothers.”

The author was obviously in something of a pique when he penned his short article (I am purposely not identifying the author or publication because of the regard in which I hold both). But even allowing for the excesses of rhetoric which we writers too often employ to dismiss those with whom we have some disagreement, the brush with which he paints home-centered fathers is exceedingly broad! Most of the Christian men I know who are aiming to “come home” are conscientiously attempting to fulfill what they understand to be a biblical duty; they are not modeling fatherhood on motherhood.

So let us ask, should Christian fathers aim to come home, even to the extent of trying to establish a home business? Is it indeed a feminization of men for them to have a home-centered understanding of their role? Does a man have an outward focus that his wife does not, and if so, is that compatible with any efforts to “come home”?

As we examine Scripture on these points we will discover that, although we do not need to become “neo-Amish”, being home-centered is indeed God’s calling for men. However, while the term “home-centered” may properly be applied to both their callings, the term means something much different for the man than for the woman. Let’s begin at the beginning.

A Job to Do, and Someone to Help

When God created man he made the male first (Gen. 2:7), gave him a job to do (v. 15), and provided him with the moral guidance he needed to get the job done (vv. 16-17). Adam’s job was to take care of the garden the Lord had planted in Eden. This was a specific application of the general job description God had given to man upon his creation: to rule, or take dominion over, the whole earth (1:26,28). The calling of the man was clearly an all-encompassing, world-changing, outward-oriented task. He was to reflect the universal dominion of his Creator-King by being a steward of this planet, re-creating and ruling this earthly domain to the glory of God.

But his task was not one he could do very well by himself. So the Lord God made a woman out of the man to be his companion-helper (2:22). Eve was, like him, in the image of God (1:27) and was to be his partner in carrying out the dominion mandate. But her role was a subordinate one; she was to assist Adam in carrying out the task God had given him before she was even created.

The heart of her role can be discerned in the other part of the dominion mandate: beyond ruling the earth, the man and woman were to “be fruitful and multiply” (1:28). The creation of woman made this fruitfulness possible. Adam could have ruled the earth without a wife, but he could not have borne children! The woman’s role was thus focused upon her husband, first of all, and then upon the children she would bear him to enable him to fulfill his calling as ruler over the earth.

The woman focuses on the home, while the man focuses on his dominion tasks with the whole world in view. This understanding of their respective roles is confirmed by noting that, after they sinned, the curse on the woman involved her children and her husband (3:16) while the curse on the man involved the ground (vv. 17-19), the earth over which he was to exercise dominion. Man is outward-oriented; woman is home-centered.

The rest of Scripture supports this understanding. The woman of Proverbs 31 is totally focused upon her husband, her children, and her household, while her husband in out in the city gates (v. 23). Similarly, Titus 2 presents a picture of a godly woman who is a “homeworker” and whose calling is absorbed with her husband and children—“so that no one will malign the word of God” (vv. 4,5). Men are church and community leaders, tentmakers, fisherman, and carpenters, carrying out their masculine callings in a myriad of ways.

(We should note that although fulfillment of the dominion mandate has been complicated by sin, God has never suspended it. Rather, he has provided in the cross of Christ the remedy that makes its fulfillment possible. So now we preach the gospel in order to make disciples of all nations, disciples who obey everything God has commanded, including the original command to rule the earth to the glory of God (Matt. 28:18-20). The Great Commission is the means to fulfilling the Dominion Mandate.)

Defining “Home-centered”

So far it may appear that our study has only served to confirm the perspective of the writer who dismisses home-centered men as merely second mommies. It is true: women are home-centered and men are outward-oriented in their callings. But this is not the entire picture. More needs to be said if we are to be faithful to all of Scripture.

The Bible also clearly shows that men are to be home-centered. Now, they are to be so in a way that is different from their wives, but they are to be so nonetheless. Let’s summarize the point first and then look at the biblical data.

A woman is home-centered in the sense that the scope of her particular calling as a woman begins and ends in the home. As we have seen, she is properly preoccupied with matters that relate to her husband, her children, and her household. As the family ministers to extended family, church, and

community she will have contact with many other people and her influence will spread; as she helps offer hospitality and stands by her husband in his various callings, she will have an effect on many other people (even “at the city gate,” Prov. 31:31). But all of her influence results from her role as the helper of her husband. God did not intend her to have an independent influence. She does have a vital part to play in taking dominion over the earth, but it is a part that is expressed solely in her home-centered functions.

A man, on the other hand, is home-centered in the sense that the foundation of his particular calling as a man is in the home. His calling by no means ends in the home; it extends to every physical element, every person, every institution on the earth, all of which he is to offer to the glory of God through Jesus Christ. But his calling most certainly does begin in the home. The family is the most important sphere in which any man exercises his God-given dominion, and he cannot effectively serve God in other spheres unless he serves well first at home. A man should be home-centered in the sense that he makes his family the first priority in his life. Out of that commitment will grow effective dominion over the whole earth.

The home-centered calling of a man is seen, first of all, in the biblical injunction for a man to love his wife, to cherish her, to live with her as a joint heir of the grace of life (Eph. 5:25,28,29,33; 1 Pet. 3:7). She who was made from his own body, and is thus bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, is the most important person in a man’s life. She is his partner, his lover, his best counselor, his friend. In marriage he enters into a covenant with her to love her faithfully as long as they both live (Mal. 2:14). At the emotional center of any home stands the woman, and it is her husband’s devotion to her that makes her a radiant wife (Eph. 5:27), a channel of blessing to every member of the household and all who come into contact with it. A married man has no higher duty than to love his wife.

The second way in which the Bible reveals the home-centered calling of a man is in its emphasis upon his duty to raise his children for God. Out of the one-flesh union of the man and his wife comes the blessing of children. The multiplication of godly offspring is one of God’s chief purposes for marriage (Mal. 2:15), and the man is blessed of God whose quiver is full of child-arrows with which he can fight the battle for godly dominion (Ps. 127:3-5). Merely having children is not enough; God wants godly offspring, well-wrought arrows. He wants men to turn their hearts toward their children (Mal. 4:6; Lk. 1:17). This certainly involves gentleness and compassion (Eph. 6:4; Ps. 103:13) but it is much more. Fathers are to turn to their children with loving discipline (Heb. 12:9) and with sober teaching about the word and works of God so that succeeding generations will serve the Lord (Ps. 78:1-8).

Turning his heart toward his wife and children is both the highest temporal duty of a man and the most effective way to fulfill his manly duty of taking dominion over the earth and making disciples for Jesus Christ. As he devotes himself to shaping his children as disciple-arrows, and they in turn shape their children in the next generation, and so on, the earth becomes filled with godly

seed. The children of the man who fears the Lord will indeed “be mighty in the land” (Ps. 112:2). Being home-centered is the most potent way for a man to be outward-oriented.

A home-centered focus is also necessary in order for a man to be effective in the other spheres in which God has called him to serve: church, civil government, commerce, etc. The Holy Spirit makes clear through Paul that a man is not even fit to lead in the church if he is not first leading his own family in a godly manner (1 Tim. 3:4-5). Faithfulness in the smaller sphere is necessary before a man can be entrusted with stewardship of a larger sphere (Matt. 25:21). A man who has not learned to manage his own family well has not developed the character necessary to take dominion in the other areas of life. Conversely, if he succeeds in the home, he is primed for success elsewhere. Real men are trained for their larger dominion tasks by faithful fulfillment of their home-centered task.

So men are indeed supposed to be home-centered—but that does not mean they are feminized. Quite the contrary. They are most masculine when they recognize that their family calling is the absolutely essential foundation for successfully carrying out their larger, outward-oriented dominion tasks.

Can “Coming Home” Go Too Far?

We come now back to the question of “coming home.” We earlier stated that it is a good thing that men are coming home in the sense of returning to their duties as head of the home and, in the process, reclaiming responsibility for education, health care, family welfare, etc. The question is, can this process go too far (as the author we quoted seems to suggest)? For example, the trend toward homeschool fathers wanting to start a home business or a self-sufficient homestead in order to be close to the family—is that going too far? Does that desire signal an abdication of a man’s outward-oriented dominion tasks? Is he making too much of his family and too little of the rest of his calling?

Our answer is threefold. The first we have just given above as we explained that being home-centered is part of a godly man’s strategy for accomplishing his dominion task. The aforementioned author presents a false choice: you will be either home-centered or outward-oriented. The fact is that you can and must be both simultaneously.

Second, a man may in fact be going “too far” in coming home if he views his family leadership role as his only calling in life. Some homeschooling fathers may indeed be a species of “neo-Amish” who renounce any world-changing role beyond the home. They are in serious error. The problem is not, however, that they are home-centered; it is that they are not also outward-oriented. A father has duties in his local church, his community, his nation, his world. His mission begins at home but does not end there. Some men will be elders, some community leaders, all should play some role in influencing these other spheres of life. For the “neo-Amish” the solution is not to remove the men

from the home but to remind them that they are also in the world, a world over which Christ now rules and which he expects Christian men to influence to his glory.

Third, the desire of a father for a home business or a homestead points to a healthy reexamination of the balance of work and family. Too many have seen their jobs as their life focus, but the focus of life for the Christian man should be service to Christ—in his home, in his work, everywhere. And this will mean viewing his vocation not as an all-consuming end in itself but as a tool for both extending his influence in the world and family discipleship. God has not created the elements of life to flow in separate, unrelated channels—job, family, church, etc. All the channels should blend as currents in a unified stream of life, each with its due emphasis. A Christian father needs to think about how God may intend to create a confluence between his vocation and his family discipleship task. Home business and homesteading are two good options.

Not every man can start a home-based business or buy land for a homestead and begin to spend all day around his family (nor will this be the form of God's calling for every man), but every man should aim to maximize his opportunities to disciple his wife and children. Some men will be able to become freemen and work for themselves or establish a family settlement, others will not, but both groups can serve the Lord Jesus, and neither can abdicate their calling to their families (cf. 1 Cor. 7:21-22). Coming home to work is not the only way for a man to increase the opportunities for discipleship of his children, but it is one of the best ways. Those who remain in callings that take them away from the family for large portions of time will have more of a challenge discipling their families, but if they are where God has placed them for now he will give the grace and wisdom to help them minimize the hindrances.

The Perfect Father-Son Relationship

Fathers need to meditate on the truth of John 5:19,20: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does." Here is revealed the perfect father-son relationship. It is characterized by an intimate association between the two, a loving relationship in which the Father models and the Son imitates. It is the original discipleship relationship. Jesus recapitulated this relationship with his disciples: he spent time with them, loved them, and provided a model for them in his life and teaching.

Fathers are responsible to disciple their sons (and daughters). How can they do this when they are not even around the home? How can they develop intimacy and express love when they are away most of the time? How can they provide a model for their children when they are not with their children? Fatherhood is so much more than putting meat on the table. It is a heart to heart relationship through which to teach children and prepare them for life. How is this happening when Dad is off at his job all day? Many men have

answered that question by getting back home vocationally, as much as possible. The more a father is with his children the more effectively he can fulfill his fatherly discipleship duties. (This is especially so with sons, and it is increasingly so the older the children are.)

Methods are not neutral. They make a difference. It makes a difference whether your children are educated at a public school or at a private Christian school or at home. Likewise, it matters whether children are raised with no exposure to their fathers or a little exposure or a lot of exposure. The same logic that suggests home education as the best alternative for raising godly children also suggests that the more a father can be present to disciple his children, the better the process will go.

So, can a father go too far in his coming home? No. He might wrongly neglect his wider calling, but he can never overdo his relationship with his family. Was God the Father too close to the Son? The more the family can be with a father to share his days, the better. A home-centered father is just trying to be like his heavenly Father.

In raising children to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ there is no substitute for the father-child relationship. In developing the father-child relationship there is no substitute for time with the child. The trend toward home-centered fathering is a promising one because it is one of the most potent forces for spreading the gospel and kingdom of Jesus.

Real men come home—as much as possible—in order that they can be truly effective in their world-shaping mission. They come home so that they can more carefully fashion the arrows in their quiver to strike a blow against the enemy and increase the dominion of the King of kings.

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