

My Dad Opened the Door for My Discipleship

Scott Brown

Thirty years ago my father began gathering our young family around the Bible in our home. He broke with family tradition and took us out of a liberal Methodist church to Calvary Church in Placentia, California. Calvary, under the leadership of John F. Tebay, was a Bible teaching church. My earliest memories of spiritual life surround an image of our fledgling family reading the Bible in a home with a few other believers, and taking notes in church as John preached. My father was the instigator. The result was that everyone in our family, one by one, came to love and trust Christ.

John was the pastor of this historic Bible teaching church founded by Charles Fuller in the 1920's as a result of a local revival.

Within this Bible teaching emphasis, John brought people together in small groups for deeper fellowship and strengthening families. John was a personal trainer of fathers and a leader of men. He believed that men should be the focus of church ministry and I remember hearing him say many times: "win the father, win the family; win the family, win the church; win the church and win the world. The themes of his ministry ring in my ears to this day.

My dad was a school teacher, a ping pong player and a writer. He was wise and good. But he was also a village strafing, napalm dropping WWII fighter pilot. He is my hero. He helped rescue the world from Adolph Hitler and Hirohito during WWII, and then came home and rescued our family from everlasting destruction by bringing the teaching of scripture and the knowledge of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ into our home in my early teen years.

This was during the 1960's and 70's when the sexual revolution, the drug culture, the Vietnam War, and the 'counter culture' were raging. But, a quiet movement was also gathering at Calvary Church Placentia. It was led by John Tebay, the pastor of the church, and several of his men, including my wife's father. He had a message that was truly counter culture and it changed the lives of many young men and women.

The core messages for families were: the supremacy of scripture, the sovereignty of God, the destructiveness of evil, the importance of the family as the basic building block of society, Biblical submission and authority in marriage, the centrality of the church as God's vehicle for healing and salvation by grace alone.

I remember one mantra quite well: "If you succeed in business but fail with your family, you have failed". I heard this from John Tebay over and over again.

John Tebay, Phil Lewis, the late Mel Friesen (of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship) were key leaders. As I look back on those days, I realize that these men were radicals in their time. Since then, I have not yet seen a church achieve the effectiveness in the area of father equipping and family strengthening that I saw there.

Calvary Church never grew to be very large, but it served to equip and send out men to be men, and women to be women. John always had a small group of families that he was training. He is still doing it today. Throughout his life, he has had an unbroken passion for equipping families.

I feel very often reflect upon how happy I am that I was allowed to know him and be under his ministry at such a critical time in my life.

John taught me God's Word, one on one, - personally - from the moment of my salvation. Immediately after my conversion, he gave me books on all matters of the faith including ecclesiology, the sovereignty of God and discipleship. I have many faded and worn books, still in my library, that John either gave me or recommended even as a teenager.

One of the books he gave me was Robert Coleman's The Master Plan of Evangelism where Coleman observes that Jesus staked his whole ministry on 12 men. His discipleship method was concentrated. It was small. It was unadorned. John demonstrated the ministry of Jesus that Coleman described.

And then he walked beside me showing me what it meant to be a leader, husband and father. This happened through an array of family integrated Bible studies, home groups, mission trips, retreats. There were Sunday schools and youth groups, but much of the church program was family integrated.

He was an equipper of men and trainer of fathers. At his feet I was inspired to love the Lord and to love the church – loves which have never waned. Outside of my father, John Tebay is the first name that always comes to mind when I hear the question: "who influenced you the most"?

He even gave me my first "DayTimer" schedule book in my late teens, to help me organize my efforts. I still use it today, except that I now keep an electronic Handspring Visor tucked in it.

John was a personal trainer of fathers as well as a leader of single men, believing that ministry to men should be the focus of church ministry. I remember hearing him say many times:

"Win the father, win the family; win the family, win the church; win the church and win the world".

The themes of his ministry ring in my ears to this day.

This early experience at Calvary Church illustrated for me how Biblical manhood works in the church. Those years made an indelible mark on my psyche for equipping men to be family shepherds.

In contrast to my early experience as a Christian, the modern church has almost completely forgotten God's delivery system for truth. Fathers have been cut out of the deal in local church structure and life and their role has been given to Sunday school teachers, women and paid staff. Church structure, often driven by pragmatism and an unhealthy desire for growth and professionalism, has grown and its tentacles have choked and paralyzed the role of fathers.

Fortunately, there are a growing number of leaders today who believe that churches need to be restructured to facilitate the Biblical order in the church and the home.

I love the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was my Father who introduced us to one another. All my life, since I was rescued by Him at age sixteen, the members of His church have been a constant source of strength to me. The pastoral care, instruction from God's Word, the fellowship and the brotherhood has comforted, corrected, and directed me. No matter where I have ever gone in this world, His people, my everlasting brothers and sisters, have been there with the truth and the loving kindness of their Master.

I have ever been aware of the value of the church and her inestimable riches in her Savior in what Paul referred to as:

"The hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power... And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" Ephesians 1:18-19,22.

I am also aware that the church has never been perfect. I have often unwittingly participated in marring her perfection, and so I am thankful for the mercy that secures her as a spotless and blameless bride.

I have never felt, as some have, that the church was so inadequate that it should be abandoned or ignored. Over the years, I have had friends, who at one time gave themselves to vocational pastoral ministry, lost their hope, and abandoned the institutional church.

I have never for a moment, lost my love and appreciation for the Church of Jesus Christ even in her often pinched and truncated state. We need to understand, that even in her imperfect state, at the end of the age, Jesus still calls her his "Bride." Rev 22:17.

Thanks Dad for introducing me to Christ and His Church.