

I find it interesting that as little children, we tried so often to step in our parents' footprints in sand or snow. As we grew older, we had to decide whose footsteps we would like to follow. Who have been your role models? What are the paths or goals which determine where you spend your time, money, and find satisfaction in life? Are your habits set in stone, or are they changed by the influence and proximity of others nearby?

John wrote this letter as a parent were talking to a child. His audience was a first or second generation of Christians. They were just getting used to what they were supposed to look like and how they were called to live. His point was that we have been adopted by God, which gives us a different role model than the earth can produce. We should therefore seek to walk in his footsteps and follow his path.

John admits that Jesus' lifestyle of a humble, sacrificial, servant love is one that isn't easy to step into. His love is unique to a broken and selfish world, and a path the world often ignores as it often gets lost following the winding path of a serpent. The effect of sin is that often lives wander far away from the perfection of original creation.

We don't often see the love of Jesus in the wisdom and power of the world, which is why Christ's entrance into this world was so necessary and so loving. As we attempt to mirror God and walk in his steps, others might be confused by where we are going as such a lifestyle is alien to a world that has grown so distant from God. It is no different than someone looking at a baby in a crowd, and saying, "I can't figure out who the parents might be. I just don't know anyone who looks like that!"

John understands this is a new beginning (in the same way Jesus had to explain to Nicodemus what it meant to be born again. He counsels us not to be frustrated if it takes time to learn how to live as loving, servant people. We are called to love God and neighbor, not to earn God's favor but because God favors us with his love. How else should an adopted child react but to love a parent who has no reason to claim us other than love. And it takes a lifetime to grow into that love.

Martin Luther once spent three days in a depression over something that had gone wrong. On the third day his wife Katie showed up for breakfast in her black dress reserved for funerals. "Who is dead?" Luther asked her. She replied, "God." Luther rebuked his wife, saying, "Katie, What do you mean, God has died? God cannot die." To which she replied, "Well, the way you have been acting, I was certain God had died."

As we glorify God by showing the world what true love means, we are being faithful children, but also mentoring neighbors, strangers, and friends into the lifestyle of discipleship and faithful servant love. Our family business is to point the orphans of the world (who are so confused and destined to die alone) to the heavenly Father who is so willing to bring all home to him, forever. We are to do this not out of obligation but love!

As a child, I thought missionaries were as normal as baseball players or teachers. Maybe because my grandfather was a missionary in the Philippines and my Godparents had been missionaries in China and Japan. I never understood, at the time, the sacrifice they undertook to carry the Light of Jesus into a world darkened by sin. I couldn't do that, as I am too selfish. Such a missionary passion seems distant and unglamorous in

today's world. It is even ridiculed as insensitive and arrogant. And yet, faith led them to travel that path.

For some reason we don't object to others attempting to proselytize our children and neighbors to follow Buddha, or Mohammed, or some fantasy system like Scientology. Why then are we so timid or embarrassed about what we know to be true?

If we are not comfortable in our skin as Christians, is that not the same as telling Mom or Dad we would rather have a different parent? We simply must decide each day whose footsteps we will follow and what others will learn as they see where our footsteps lead.

Our call is not to assume we are better than anyone else or must force them to hear our story. But why would we ever be embarrassed to admit the love of our heavenly parent and the family that he has made ours.?

We live in a world that often doesn't understand Christians or even is hostile because the love of Jesus is not the guiding lot of their lives. That doesn't necessarily mean they are evil, but often other issues and motivations are the guiding forces of their lives.

I used to squirm when someone said I was just like my father. I wanted to be different, unique, my own person. Over the years I learned to appreciate how special my dad was, and what an honor it is for me, to be associated with him, or recognized as his son. That is what John is up to as well! As we are faithful to our baptismal genetics, and allow faith to be our guide, we honor our heavenly Father. As we grow in learning forgiveness and servant love, even in our imperfect fashion, we reveal the surprise of the Gospel to the world! Think of the power of grace for a child to be adopted. Multiply that by infinity and now we understand the blessings of being claimed as a child of God!

During the Civil War a chaplain approached wounded soldier. He asked, "Would you like to hear a few Bible verses?" *"No, I'm so thirsty, I'd rather have some water."* He gave some of his canteen water and repeated the question. *"No, not now – but could you put something under my head?"* The chaplain did and repeated his question. *"No,"* said soldier, *"I'm cold. Could you cover me?"* And he did. At that point he started to leave and did not repeat his question. As he turned, the soldier called, *"Chaplain, if there's anything in that book of yours that makes a person do for another what you've done for me, then I want to hear it!"*

Like parent, like child? See what love the father has given that we should be called his children! Our living not only is about begin faithful to God but understanding that in our new footsteps others might have the opportunity to learn about God by how we live.

My favorite poem by Robert Frost ends with this line: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference."¹ May God fill us with the peace and power of being his adopted children. And don't be afraid to let others know whose you are, and why that is a gift that it is OK to share.

(seeber)

¹ Robert Frost. "The Road Less Travelled"