

## **“Wisdom of Our Fathers”**

### **I Kings 2:1-4**

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### **Fathers’ Day**

He has interviewed hundreds of people on television, including politicians, movie stars and sports heroes. When asked who he most wanted to interview, he quickly responded, “My dad.” He did that interview and wrote about it in his number one bestselling book, Big Russ and Me.

In this book, Tim Russert not only talked about his dad, but also described the enormous love and respect he has for his father. Russert’s dad is a plainspoken WW II veteran who worked two blue-collar jobs to support his family in South Buffalo, New York. “He lived his life by the grace of daily obligations,” Russert wrote.

As Russert’s career progressed and the pressures of his broadcasting job intensified, he found himself turning to his dad for advice. He was amazed at how wise his father was and how sound his advice always seemed. Russert credits much of his success as an interviewer and host of “Meet the Press” to his father’s influence.

After Russert wrote Big Russ and Me, he received an avalanche of letters and emails from people that wanted to tell him about their fathers. He compiled the correspondence into his newest book, Wisdom of Our Fathers, which hit the bookshelves about a month ago. This book is a celebration of the positive qualities passed down from generation to generation. The lesson most often learned from fathers was to live a life of honor.

Perhaps this was the lesson that David wanted Solomon to remember, too. David, the second and greatest king of Israel, was dying after a forty year reign. He made it very clear that Solomon was to succeed him and felt confident this would occur. Soon Solomon would sit on the royal throne and be responsible for the welfare of the people. Like any father in this situation, David had mixed emotions. No doubt he was proud of his second son by Bathsheba, but also concerned about how he would handle the pressure of ruling, especially since he had no divine mandate to be king but was hand-picked by his father. What were David’s parting words and what was his final advice? Listen as I read I Kings 2:1-4.

“I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong and show yourself a man and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in His ways and keeping his statutes, commandments, ordinances and testimonies as it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you turn. Do this so that the Lord may establish His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a man on the throne of Israel.’ ”

What was David’s advice to Solomon? He charged him to be strong, good and faithful to God. I grin when I read this knowing that, at times, David failed to do all three. As a matter of fact, there were times when he failed miserably, bringing shame to himself and problems to the people entrusted to his care.

Perhaps this is why David gave this specific advice, though. He did not want Solomon to travel down some of the roads he did, making the same mistakes. I have no doubt this advice came from a contrite heart born out of his own experiences. This is the best kind of advice to share, isn’t it? Let’s look at David’s advice to Solomon and see what we can glean from it on this Father’s Day.

**David began by encouraging Solomon to be strong.** “Be strong and show yourself a man,” he said. Why did David want Solomon to be strong and what kind of strength was he talking about? Is this a reference to brute force and a macho mentality? I don’t deny that this can

be read into the text given the culture of violence and death in which they lived and the brutal treatment of enemies and rivals to the throne.

Could it mean more, though? I think so and believe it could be a reference to inner strength, a resolve to say no to things that are harmful and yes to things that are healthy.

David knew that Solomon would face great personal challenges, temptations and adversity. He would be tested many times and sometimes in his weakest moments. The strength of the challenge had to be matched by his steady resolve to do right or he and those around him would suffer devastating consequences.

Recently I listened to an interview with the chief of the Maroni tribe. When asked, “What makes a good Maroni?” the chief replied, “I’ll not answer what makes a good Maroni but a great Maroni. A great Maroni is tough when necessary and tender when he needs to be. What makes him great is knowing what the moment calls for.” Maybe this is what David was saying to Solomon.

That same NPR program expounded on this idea of being a tough and tender leader. The Attack on America on September 11, 2001 revealed something this country had not seen often. Strong men cried openly. Firefighters, policemen, military personnel and many others openly shed tears of anguish over the loss of comrades. Were they any less strong for doing so? I don’t think so.

**David challenged Solomon to be good.** For David, this meant two things. Solomon was to live his life in full view of God and according to their understanding of God’s will.

“Be strong and show yourself a man and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in His ways and keeping his statutes, commandments, ordinances and testimonies as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you turn.”

I know their understanding of God’s will was not identical to ours and should not be since we have studied the life and words of Jesus. At the same time, David believed that God had instructed his people how to live and even the king of the land was to obey. As a matter of fact, he was to be the role model for others to see and follow. So important was this that David connected Solomon’s righteousness to his success as a king.

**David admonished Solomon to be faithful to God.** David had no doubt that God would be faithful to Solomon, leading him in the right direction and empowering him to follow. He also had no doubt that Solomon would be tempted to trust his own judgment rather than God’s. As wise as Solomon was, David knew that God was wiser. Solomon did not need to replace God with idols of his own making or anyone else’s. He needed to trust God with all his heart and soul.

**Was Solomon always strong, good and faithful?** No and no one can be. I think God, like any loving father understood, though. He knew that living and leading would require that Solomon learn and grow. When I read Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and other wisdom literature, much of which is attributed to Solomon, I get the sense that Solomon learned a lot from his walk with the Lord and his own father, David.

**How about you?** What have you learned from those that God has sent your way to help you understand life? What words of your father and other family members bring you comfort and guide your steps? What pitfalls have you avoided because you listened to them? When do you wish you had listened to them?

As a parent, how are you passing on to your children what you have learned about life? How accessible are you to your children and grandchildren? What kind of role model are you? If your children listen to you and follow your example, will they live a life of honor?

One of my favorite stories in Wisdom of Our Fathers was written by Brian Baker about his dad, Bob. Both of them were huge New York Giants fans. In 1990, Brian’s dad took him to the NFC championship game against the San Francisco 49ers. Brian’s dad had four tickets but they only needed two. He planned to sell the other two and Brian was wondering how much money his dad would make. Knowing there would be a great demand for the tickets, Brian envisioned his dad making several hundred dollars that day, possibly over a thousand.

Each time someone approached them to buy the tickets as they made their way to the stadium, Brian's dad turned them down. As the price rose, Brian was confident his dad would take the money, but he did not. Finally they reached the entrance to the stadium and Brian's dad stopped to look around. He spotted a father and son that needed tickets and approached them.

"Do you need tickets?" he asked. "Yes we do," they replied. "I have two for you and want only face value for them," Brian's dad said.

Brian looked at his dad with awe and was even more amazed when he heard him say, "Knowing a dad and his son will enjoy this game today will bring me more happiness than a pocket full of cash."

Do you think Brian will forget this lesson? Obviously he hasn't yet and I don't think he ever will.

If your children follow your example, will they live a life of honor? Perhaps you need to talk to your Heavenly Father about this and ask for His advice and help. I have to believe this would bring a big smile to His face, especially on Father's Day.