



## Fathering and Being Fathered

By Andrew Comiskey

1996 burst upon Desert Stream with a flurry of activity and renewed momentum. God seems to be accelerating His call to us to raise up a healing army. As Director, I am continually challenged by the Father's call upon me to "father" that army; that call was the subject of the year-end report for 1995. I'd like to elaborate further on the task of fathering. In particular, I want to emphasize my ongoing need to remain present to the Spirit of the Father if I am genuinely to carry out His call for me to father others. A linear model of masculine development which charts a progression from infancy to fatherhood isn't helpful here. I find that the stronger I need to be as a father, the more child-like I must become in my reliance upon the Heavenly Father.

### Fathering: Helpful Definitions

By fathering, I refer to the task of initiating relationship with others for the purpose of imparting vision to them and then helping them to realize their part in the outworking of that vision. The mantle of father seems to be increasing, perhaps in conjunction with my increasing maturity as a father of four children, but also as the Lord has made it clear that the main task of Desert Stream is to raise up and equip leaders to carry out the work of the ministry. Our goal of releasing those oppressed by sexual brokenness and AIDS remains. We seek to attain that goal by equipping the saints to set them free, as opposed to seeking to heal all the broken ones ourselves.

Fathering involves a desire to generate new life. As a Christian leader, fathering means equipping others to stand in the Father's call upon their lives. And as each take their place in the healing army, my own efforts are reproduced many times over by the unique display of Jesus demonstrated by each one. Standing as father in this way has been a crucial part of my own development as a man, and has furthered the growth of the ministry as well. Father Richard Rohr writes: "Every man needs to be a source of creation. In every masculine soul there is a desire to be a source of new life...This desire to be a source of creation is our deepest identification with God the Father. It expresses itself in the desire for fatherhood, whether it be to have children in the usual physical sense or to have spiritual children in the sense of fostering growth and maturity in others." (The Wild Man's Journey. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1992, pp.167,169,170.)

What Rohr describes as "authoring new life" may more accurately be described as blessing and refining those whom the Father has already regenerated through His Spirit. In that way, spiritual fathering in no way implies authorship but does involve collaborating with the true Author of life in helping the emerging one to come into his or her true form. I am at once intimately involved in that emerging life, and yet aware that (s)he belongs wholly to Another. My word and will for him or her is thus always tempered by the truth that the Father stands between us. The strength of my fathering is determined by the degree to which that one is strengthened to carry out His will.

I see this clearly with my own children. As they grow, I must learn to father in light of who the Father has created them to be. I hope I help them to realize their true form; I hope my fathering will help to

solidify their souls and lend definition to their frames. Perhaps I will at times approximate the Father's love and grace for them in a way that disposes them to accept themselves as unique and beloved expressions of His hand. Certainly I experience masculine pride in the way that I have contributed to their creation and in the way that they reveal Annette and I in their identities. Beyond their natural inheritance, each child reveals a design and a purpose that is authored by the Father's sovereign will. In relation to the Master Creator, we as parents are co-authors at best.

### Fathering: The Call to See Beyond Oneself

That in no way downplays the significant role of fathering. Men and women alike need to be awakened by the masculine voice if they are to stand in the fullness of what God has called them to be. That masculine voice seems to be especially relevant in calling forth broken ones out of the circle of their brokenness and into the reality of their calling as healing soldiers. One of our greatest temptations in healing ministry is to become mired in our woundedness. Having hobbled into the healing stream, we grow comfortable in the soothing waters and a bit resistant to stretching our being-healed-limbs in service to others. What I have found is that God continues the healing process as we will to serve others in a way that is appropriate to our gifts and preparedness. We don't become whole and then serve. Our wholeness emerges over the course of a journey marked by both receiving the healing stream and releasing it to others.

That aspect of fathering has come to the fore in the last several months. I've noticed that our Desert Stream conferences have been less focused on the depth of our brokenness and more focused on the depth of His provision for us in our brokenness. In turn, we are experiencing a new richness and solidity in His presence which has inspired fresh hope for ourselves and others. In light of that hope, I am calling forth our conferees to freely extend what God has given them. He will finish the work He has begun in them, and that work will be quickened by their obedience to give as well as to receive. I observed this fullness of giving and receiving at the annual healing conference sponsored by the Vineyard Anaheim in January of this year. God poured out His Spirit to cleanse and heal the participants as He commissioned them to pray for one another.

During that conference, we called people forth to confess their sins. However, I noticed we had very few team members to facilitate the binding away of the confessed sins and the loosing of forgiveness. I realized that each participant would have to pray for another. The only requirement was that they first receive forgiveness for themselves. Once our four prayer team members had prayed for the first four participants, the team doubled in size and kept doubling until nearly 300 people had confessed their sexual sin and in turn received cleansing and forgiveness. Upon hearing some feedback, I discovered that many experienced as much freedom from extending forgiveness to others as they did receiving it.

The same thing happened as I directed the healers in the group to pray for those who had experienced significant wounding in their relationships with parents. Women came forward to pray for those bearing the "mother-wound;" men came forward to bolster and strengthen those who had been inadequately fathered. The Spirit moved with great tenderness and strength to impart healing to the receivers. Of equal importance was the empowering of the saints to facilitate these crucial healings. We ended the series of workshops with a time of impartation for the range of gifts and callings represented that are crucial for effective church-based ministry to the sexually broken and those affected by AIDS--pastors and elders, healers, intercessors, and evangelists. Not only did individuals receive healing, they received the empowerment necessary to give away the good gifts that God had given them.

### The Father is a Son

The task of fathering is as exciting as it is wearisome. Of late I've grown increasingly aware of how much I am giving out during those focused times of helping to mobilize the healing army. And it is in those times that I need fathering. Simply put, I need to receive His Presence as the source and sustenance of my own well-being as a son. I can only father others to the degree that I abide with the Father as a receptive son. At times the weariness and hunger for Him is so great that all I can do is avail myself to His Presence in quiet, with my hands outstretched and my face turned upward like a baby bird awaiting food from its mother. And He feeds me in the stillness as I simply focus my mind upon the magnificence of the cross and receive His invitation to rest. Over the last year, my prayer times have grown less cluttered, perhaps a fitting complement to greater responsibility on family and ministry fronts. In those times of quiet, I want only Him. The precise nature of our dialogue matters less than His feeding, strengthening Presence. To be with my Father is reward enough.

The Father has been impressing upon me the absolute necessity of such reliance upon His fathering as I seek to father others. In truth, it is not just a benefit; it is a matter of spiritual life or death. God used a recent running experience of mine to illustrate the dire need for receiving as a son. During a recent trip to Ohio in mid-winter, I ventured out for a jog at 6 AM. I assumed it would be cold, but I was not prepared for the --20 degree wind chill factor that blasted me when I changed directions upon my return to the hotel room. The freezing cold penetrated the thin layers of my clothes and drew the heat out of my body at an alarming rate. A ferocious head-ache and nausea followed. I prayed that God would give me the grace to make it back to my room.

Once back, I was frightened by my body's inability to receive the warmth of the room temperature. I couldn't contain the heat; it was as if the cold had taken control within me. I laid on the bed, clutching the blankets and pillows. Still, relief was not immediate. It took about one-half hour until the warmth prevailed. During that time, the Lord gave me an image of a huge down comforter that He was placing around me. That image assured me that the Father was in control, and that He would restore me. Later on, I could see how the Lord was using that experience to show me the effects of my fathering. All the demands I face function as a tremendous drain upon my resources. Like the cold air, they draw out the warmth within. If the demands are not regulated, they can strip the body of its capacity to function at all.

While sharing with the team of my adventure in "hypothermia," one member shared this account of a televised rescue of a 10-year-old boy who had been lost in the mountains during the winter. The fireman who discovered him opened his jacket and pulled up a couple of layers of underclothes; he then removed the kid's jacket and shirt and pressed him up against his bare chest. He wrapped his clothes and jacket around the boy and held him so that his face was facing the boy's. That position enabled the fireman's body heat to be transferred back to the child's; it also enabled the rescuer to speak words of life and peace to the boy. He spoke to him about baseball and fishing which directed the child's attention off the fear and pain he was in. The fireman held him and spoke to him in this way for two hours until they arrived at a hospital. The boy recovered.

The story reminded me of the Lord's great faithfulness to draw near to us with almost embarrassing intimacy. In His nearness to us, He imparts life where we are empty, deadened for whatever reason. It reminds me also of Elisha's approach to the dead son of the Shunammite; "He got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm." (2 Kings 4:34) Our Father is faithful to impart His Presence to us in the deep places, enabling us once more to contain His life and be renewed by it. For me His fathering has bolstered me in those areas where I grow weary as father.

My capacity to father well depends upon my receiving continually from my Heavenly Father. The task of fathering four children and an army of healers requires an exacting outer-directedness; the

focus and the force of that output seems to grow in strength and clarity as I mature. Still, that output is life-giving only as long as I am yielded to the Father of life. In order to father well, I must abide in the Father as a dependent son.