

Black Belt Dad Level 1: A Christ-like Father

Case Study #1.1: Faith

A Christ-like Father treasures and transmits his Catholic faith.

WHEN KIDS HAVE DOUBTS

[John and Jane explain:]

Our son, Bob, goes to a Catholic high school, and we keep careful track of his religious education. The school's program seems sound. Recently, however, our son made friends with a classmate whose dad is an ex-priest. This man told the boys a story about religion that Bob enthusiastically reported to us, but we know it's dead wrong.

The underlying idea is that all the world's religions are really the same. Religion itself is like an elephant, and the different religions are like blind men who touch different parts of the elephant (one touches the trunk, another the tail, another a leg...). Since the different parts feel different, the various blind men think that only their religion is true. And so they start arguing with each other, when really all of them are right. These arguments, explained the ex-priest, have led to all the wars and injustices of history.

The ex-priest went on to say that in modern times, humanity has actually been cured from its blindness by scientific advances. Now we can see that the elephant is just an elephant. The man finished by telling the boys that it's OK to continue believing in religion for now, but eventually they will also see the light and call the elephant an elephant.

He even gave the boys a little pamphlet (published by www.atheists.org) explaining that all religion is false. Here is the first page:

- *In the history of the world, nothing has been the catalyst of more grief, hatred, war, and crime than religion. Religion allows a person to hate, kill, torture, or steal, while allowing him to excuse himself of all blame. Religion causes people to break the laws of ethics and morality in the name of a god.*
- *Religion dulls the mind and weakens the senses. It makes "God did it" seem like a reasonable answer to anything at all, squelching questions of why, and how, and when, and replacing these questions with repeated mantras and prayers to nobody.*

Bob never before raised objections to his faith, and we have assured him that these ideas are wrong. But now we are up against this ex-priest's influence over our son. We know these ideas don't make sense, and we know our faith is rational, but we wonder how to deal with the situation without alienating our son, who already seems enamored of these new, false ideas. We know that kids his age go through fads, but maybe this one is too dangerous to ignore. We also wonder if we should confront the ex-priest (Bob's friend's dad).



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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have I ever experienced or witnessed a similar situation? What did I learn from it?
2. What are the *causes* of this dilemma?
3. Is there any way John and Jane could have avoided this dilemma?
4. What would you do if you were in their shoes?
5. Which do you think has a stronger impact on kids, listening to what their teachers say in religion class, or kneeling down with dad to pray every day before going to bed?

QUOTATION

“So many tragic cases I have seen of a child who has gone off the rails is because their parents have been sleepwalking — their child has grown up to be not merely in the world but ‘of the world’ — while the parents’ attention has been on their job, their house, their garden...”

(Gladys Sweeney, Institute for the Psychological Sciences)

POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

(This week, how can I put into action what I’ve learned from this discussion?)

- Spend 10 minutes alone with each of your children discussing why faith is important to the family...
- Attend 30 minutes of adoration with your children...
- Discuss a story of a famous conversion to faith (e.g. Thomas Merton or St. Augustine)...
- My idea...

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- John 14:1-11
- Romans 1:16-32
- Deuteronomy 4:32-40
- Catechism #s 26-49



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Case Study #1.2: Wisdom

A Christ-like Father gently but firmly instructs his children in what is right and what is wrong.

ESTABLISHING BORDERS IN A BORDERLESS WORLD

Tara is your twelve-year-old daughter's new best friend at school this year. Tara lives with two moms, a lesbian couple who adopted her years ago. Tara's birthday is coming up, and she has invited her friends over for a slumber party at her house. Your daughter wants to go. You and your wife are not sure that's such a good idea. You both ask around for advice. Read through the list below, then identify the flaws and the good points of each piece of advice.

- **Your friend Dan says:** "Sure! Lesbians have rights too. You don't want your daughter to be homophobic or anything. I mean, gay people don't choose to be gay, that's just how they're made. It's as normal for them as being heterosexual is for us."
- **Your wife's friend Matilda says:** "I can't believe you have let your daughter become friends with a girl that has two moms. Don't you realize that your daughter will be corrupted by that? You should demand that she stays away from that friend from now on, and she should definitely not go to the slumber party!"
- **Bruce, your barber, says:** "Well, I think this is an opportunity. Now is the perfect time for your wife to explain the birds and the bees to your daughter. As long as she understands the difference between homosexual tendencies and homosexual actions, and why homosexual actions are not part of God's plan, then I don't see anything wrong with letting her go to the party."
- **Your business partner says:** "Joan and I put our foot down on slumber parties a long time ago. We just don't do them anymore. Nowadays, there is just too much risk for young kids – did you know that one out of every 3 girls is sexually abused at some point before they become adults, and 1 out of every 8 boys? At least, that's the statistic I read most recently. And in a household where immoral sexual conduct is considered normal is probably even less safe for your daughter."
- **Your dad says:** "She's too young and too impressionable. You just don't know what influences could be around. Tell her she can't sleep over (explaining why in very simple and clear terms), but tell her she is free to invite Tara and Tara's guardians over to your house for dinner to celebrate her birthday."



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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the good points of each particular person's advice? What are the flaws of each perspective?
2. Have I ever experienced or witnessed a similar situation? What did I learn from it?
3. What are the causes of this dilemma (what conflicting fears/emotions are making it hard to decide what to do)?
 - a. Would I be worried about being considered intolerant or judgmental?
 - b. How do I know when my daughter is "ready" to maturely handle this inevitable kind of life situation?
 - c. If I let my daughter go, would I be guilty of condoning this type of lifestyle?
3. Can you think of any ways to handle this situation that would clearly be wrong?

QUOTATION

"Love the sinner; hate the sin."
(St Augustine of Hippo)

POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

(This week, how can I put into action what I've learned from this discussion?)

- Ask each of your children to pray a decade of the rosary with you
- Spend time with my child reading the catechism and discussing what it says about homosexuality
- Discuss with the children how my wife and I ended up together (story of our courtship)
- My idea...

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Matthew 17:24-27
- 1 Timothy 1:8-17
- Catechism #s 2357-2359



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Case Study #1.3: Love

A Christ-like Father involves his children in the good deeds he performs for others.

THE PATH TO KNIGHTHOOD

Medieval Europe had no police force, no regular army, and no unified justice system. The waves of barbarian invasions characteristic of the Dark Ages created a system known as *feudalism*: the strongest warrior in an area ruled as much land and population as he could *intimidate and control by violence and force*. Barely civilized warriors constantly *vied against each other* for power, and the masses of people not wealthy or ruthless enough to buy or steal horses, weapons, and armor suffered the fallout of their private wars. Western society was on the verge of *collapsing into barbaric chaos*. Then the tide began to turn, because of the *knights*.

Barbarian warriors who were new converts to Christianity had a certain, if at times only superstitious, respect for the clergy, and kept chaplains in their castles. Courageous chaplains and monks therefore had the chance to convince these warriors to use their strength and power to build up civilization instead of destroying it. The result? *The chivalric code*. Knights, castellans, barons, and dukes gradually began to envision their mission in terms of defending justice and maintaining peace and prosperity — of becoming for the Lord to whom they pledged fealty *a Christ-centered warrior*: battling against evil and fighting for good, especially through coming to the aid of those (the poor, weak, defenseless, orphans, widows...) who were easily exploitable by *self-centered warriors*.

But to become a knight was a long process. When a boy was eight-years-old, *he would become a page* — basically, an intern in a castle. Educated there in the arts of war, manly virtue, and knightly etiquette, when he turned 15 or 16 he could be *assigned as a squire* to a real knight, and begin accompanying that knight on his missions of war, diplomacy, and justice. Thus he could *see the knight in action, assist him, and learn from him*. Only after five or six years as a faithful squire under the tutelage of a real knight could a young man hope to be knighted, if he showed himself worthy.

Today, barbarism has taken different forms. Today, *every Christian father is a knight at the service of the Lord of heaven and earth*. He is called to put his strength and power, his talents and creativity, at the service of Christ's Kingdom. His good deeds at home, at the parish, at work, and in the world at large constitute *his adventure and his quest*. This knight's children need to go through their stages of training as page and squire, *seeing their father engaged in battle*, engaged in building things, in exercising his expertise, in changing things for the better. The daughters need to see this so that they can recognize and foster the qualities of a true Christian warrior in their future husband; the sons need their experience as a squire to prepare them for their own quest.



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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. When I was growing up, in what ways did my dad or other father figures allow me to be a squire to their knighthood?
 - How did I feel when my dad took me with him to work or on a business trip?
 - How did I feel when my dad let me help him with his projects around the house?
 - How did I feel when I was finally old enough to go with dad and his friends on their fishing trips?
 - How did I feel when my dad brought me with him to visit a sick and dying relative?
 - What do I wish that my dad would have shared with me that he never did?
2. What cultural influences in today's society militate against dads being true mentors for their children?
3. To what extent can our work and professional lives really be considered "knightly"? To what extent is my attitude towards my work and hobbies "knightly"? Do I seek excellence in them because I see myself as Christ's soldier and ambassador?
4. In my family, to what extent do we value our "family name" and "family reputation"? What can I do to encourage a healthy mystique about our family honor?

QUOTATION

"What greater work is there than training the mind and forming the habits of the young?"

(St John Chrysostom)

POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

(This week, how can I put into action what I've learned from this discussion?)

- For children over 13, watch "The Passion of The Christ" with the family.
- As a family, discuss what is wrong with the Catholic congressmen and women that support abortion rights and how they are not representative of Catholic teaching.
- Invite my child to participate with me in my apostolate.
- My idea...

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Mark 5:35-43
- Tobit 4:1-5:4
- Catechism #s 2201-2206



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Case Study #1.4: Responsibility

A Christ-like Father strives as conscientiously for excellence at home as he does for excellence at work.

THE BOTTOM LINE

In the 1990s, renowned educator and speaker James B Stenson published and distributed a truly excellent booklet entitled “Successful Fathers.” In this little treatise, he not only explains societal and psychological factors affecting fatherhood, but he also gives a list of characteristics that form an objective “bottom line” for success in a man’s most crucial job: being a dad. Below are the twelve characteristics (gathered through his research and extensive interaction with hundreds of families) in that list. Stenson, however, listed them in a different order. As you read through the list, try to decide which three characteristics you think are more important than all the others:

- a. **Successful fathers have a sense of supportive partnership with their wives.** They are neither domineering nor neglectful. They sincerely appreciate their wives’ sacrifices, hard work, long hours, and loving attention to detail... They show this appreciation in front of their children.
- b. **Successful fathers think long-term about their children’s future character as grown-up men and women.** They think of inner strengths, not career choices... They see themselves raising adults, not children.
- c. **Successful fathers frequently talk with their wives about the children’s character strengths and weaknesses.** Such men are conscious that their wives are probably more sensitive and insightful in these areas, and they respect their judgment. Though they may have disagreements with their wives on tactical matters, they are determined to come to some agreement.
- d. **These fathers frequently discuss things with their children.** Conversation is the most common leisure activity at home.
- e. **And, of course, such fathers listen to their children as well.** They listen for what is unspoken and implied. They come to understand the changes taking place in the children’s minds, and they steer the children’s judgment about people and affairs.
- f. **Successful fathers keep television watching and other media use to a minimum.** They realize that TV steals time from the family’s life together. It squelches conversation. Whenever something worthwhile is on, the family (or most of it) watches together.
- g. **Successful fathers see discipline, not as punishment or mere behavior-control, but rather as a means of building the children’s self-control.** They see that “No” is also a loving word.
- h. **Successful fathers are confident of their authority.** They know that fatherhood is not an elective office. Their authority as father does not come from the consent of the governed. It comes with the job; it comes from the responsibility given by God and taken on freely by the man himself.

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- i. **Most successful fathers seem to have a number of close friends.** The home is open to guests: neighbors, relatives, colleagues from work, friends from childhood... Close friendship brings out the best in us, and it's healthy for the children to see this.
- j. **Successful fathers frequently have a deep and active religious faith.** The children see them pray and take serious interest in doctrinal-moral formation.
- k. **Successful fathers teach their children to be "poor in spirit."** Such men know that excessive wealth can corrupt people, adults as well as children... God did not create us to be mere "consumers."
- l. **Successful fathers always put their family's welfare ahead of their jobs.** They know that their children can be seriously hurt through fatherly neglect, and no job advantages – no raises or promotions or projects completed – can compensate for this loss.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of those characteristics did you see most exemplified in your own father, and how did he exemplify it?
2. If you could choose for yourself ONLY THREE of the characteristics, which ones would you choose and why?
3. Choose one of your top three characteristics. In practical terms, what do you think that looks like (or could look like) in day-to-day life?

QUOTATION

"The children's earthly and eternal happiness depends, in enormous measure, on their father's influence during the first two decades of life. This is a brief span of time, and it passes only once. God has ordained it as a central fact of existence: Parents have one chance – and only one – to raise their children right."

(James B Stenson)

POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

(This week, how can I put into action what I've learned from this discussion?)

- Look for a moment to correct your child when they are disrespectful to their mother.
- Have a roundtable discussion with the children to discuss a family challenge, such as too much T.V.
- Take a son or daughter out to ice-scream and spend time 1-on-1 time discussing the important things for them happening at school and/or with friends.
- My idea...

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Matthew 25:31-46; Ephesians 6:4
- Catechism #1655-1658, 2221-2230
- Wisdom 9



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Case Study #1.5: Integrity

A Christ-like Father controls his temper, masters his fears, and avoids laziness like the plague.

WEDDING BLUES*

It's exactly 24 hours before his sister's wedding and Pete still hasn't decided if he and his family will be attending the nuptials. Thinking back now, Pete still finds the occurrences of the past three months a bit hard to believe.

The Background

Pete and his sister Ann grew up in a devout Christian family. Ann is eight years younger than Pete, so although they are on good speaking terms, the two have never really been that close. Pete has a good relationship with his parents and has always been grateful to them for the strong Christian foundation they gave him. To his parents' delight, eleven years ago Pete married Trish who is also a practicing Christian. The two are very active in their parish, so whenever Ann comes to visit them and spends time with their 10-year-old son Ryan, she joins them for church on Sunday. Although Pete isn't sure if she attends Mass regularly, he's never suspected Ann of falling away from her faith.

The Issue

Two years ago Ann began dating a man named John. Pete and Trish met him a few times and although they aren't sure he is the best match for Ann, they are glad to see that she is finally happy and content in a relationship. Three months ago at Ryan's First Communion party, Ann tells her brother that she is engaged to marry John. Later during the party, Trish speaks with John and finds out that both he and Ann have been members of "Wicca" for several years; in fact, that is how the two had met. That evening, Trish and Pete research the Wicca religion on the internet and are very upset with what they find:

"Wicca" is a neo-pagan, nature-based religion that worships a Horned God and Goddess. Wiccans practice witchcraft and a liberal code of morality. A key belief in Wicca is that the God and Goddess manifest themselves in human form through a Priest and Priestess — these two "divine" individuals perform all Wiccan marriages.

Pete meets with his parents later that week to see if they know about Ann's religion and are aware that Ann will not be getting married in the church. To Pete and Trish's surprise, his parents know about Ann's religion (to an extent), but when Pete tries to give them a more in-depth explanation of Wicca they become very defensive and say "she's not worshipping the devil, so can't you just be happy for your sister?" Pete keeps his mouth shut, but wants to say "maybe so, but she's not worshipping the one true God."

The Dilemma

As the weeks go by, Pete and Trish get even more uncertain about attending this wedding and exposing their son to what they are beginning to believe is more of a cult than a religion. In conversation one day, Ann gives a description of the actual ceremony, "We'll be married by the High Priest and Priestess who'll be dressed in black flowing gowns. And at the end of the vows, John and I will jump over a broom — which represents jumping from two separate lives into one joined life. It's going to be special."

Now on the eve of the wedding, Pete feels caught between a rock and a hard place. Both he and Trish do not want to support a union that goes against their belief of the Christian sanctity of marriage, but they also don't want to cause a

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*A true life situation, though the names have been altered.



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family upheaval. They know if they don't attend the wedding they will come across as pious and judgmental – as Ann has recently accused them of being. Missing the wedding would destroy any bond that Pete has left with Ann and would undoubtedly break his parents' heart. But what about his integrity? Pete and Trish believe they can't willingly be witnesses to Ann's wedding and bless this "religious" union. And how are they suppose to answer the multitude of questions their son is bound to ask since his Aunt's wedding will be so different from the three Christian weddings he's attended over the past 18 months?

Pete knows he needs to make a decision tonight. As Pete's friend, what advice will you give him?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have I ever experienced or witnessed a similar situation? What did I learn from it?
2. What are the causes of this dilemma (what conflicting fears/emotions are making it hard for Pete to decide what to do)?
 - a. If Pete takes his son to the wedding, what message would he be communicating?
 - b. If Pete attends the wedding, what message is he giving to his sister?
 - c. If Pete doesn't attend the wedding, what message is he sending to his parents?
3. Can you think of any ways to handle this situation that would clearly be wrong?
4. How can Pete show his respect for his sister as a human being without giving her (and everyone else) the impression that he approves of her pagan religion?

QUOTATION

"An open town, and without defenses: such is the man lacking self-control."

(Proverbs 25:28)

POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

(This week, how can I put into action what I've learned from this discussion?)

- With the family, read from the catechism of the Catholic Church a description on witchcraft and the church's position.
- Discuss with my son why he is not allowed to view a particular television program series with characters involved in the occult.
- Begin to educate my children about the other world religions and why they're different from the Catholic faith (before someone else misinforms them).
- My idea...

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Matthew 7:21-29
- Daniel 3
- Catechism #162



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Case Study #1.6: Fortitude

A Christ-like Father wields the sword of hope and the shield of faith to protect himself and his children from every attack of discouragement.

BEING A FATHERLY FORTRESS

In 2006, Meg Meeker, MD published an excellent book called *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters: 10 Secrets Every Father Should Know*. Among those secrets were the following:

- You are the most important man in her life.
- You are her first love.
- Protect her, defend her (use a shotgun if necessary).
- Be the man you want her to marry.

In Chapter 5, Meg relates the following true story, about how a father was able to impart strength and courage to his daughter:

Mary, now forty-two years old, is the mother of four children. She told me that from the time she can remember until she graduated from college, her father came to her bedroom every night to say good night.

Her father, Brett, was a general practitioner in a small town, and Mary remembers their phone ringing constantly. He would routinely leave during the night to help anyone who was sick. Her mother waited long hours in the evening to have supper with him. Mary said that she missed him terribly but deep down admired his commitment to a job he felt was noble. He cared deeply for his patients. But Mary always knew that he loved her and his family.

“I guess that’s why his coming to say good night was so special,” she told me. “I didn’t see my dad as much as I wanted and those few minutes we spent together were private. They were just ours.”

Mary went on to say, “I would just be dozing off when light from the hallway would appear in my room. He would pad over to my bed and sit on the edge. He was big and the side would droop, causing me to roll toward him.

Sometimes he sat there and we’d talk. Other times if I was too tired I sensed him praying. He never prayed out loud, just in his head. He told me he thanked God for me and that I was special. Then he always leaned over to kiss me before leaving and whispered words in my ear that I thought at the time were peculiar. He’d say: ‘Remember, Mary, your wedding night. It’s very special and so are you.’ That was it.

“You can’t believe how good that made me feel about myself and about my dad. When I was in high school and college I met guys and wondered if they felt like my dad did. If they didn’t, I brushed them off. Dad was a giant in my eyes. What did I do about sex in high school and college? I can tell you that I thought long and hard. And every time I thought about it, I heard his words. They never made me feel guilty or bad. They made me feel strong and in charge of myself. And because of them I turned a lot of guys away who wanted sex.”



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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What struck you most about this story and why?
2. Why do you think this small family tradition had such a big impact on Mary?
3. What sacrifices did Mary's dad have to make in order to keep up this tradition?
4. "Discouragement comes from feeling alone; encouragement comes from knowing that someone cares." Discuss.
5. What helps you battle discouragement?
6. From your experience, what is the best way to encourage your sons? Your daughters?

QUOTATION

"When she is a baby, her eyes will search for your face. Her ears will listen for your voice and everything inside her will need to answer only one question, "Daddy, are you here?" If you are there, her body will grow better. Her IQ will start to rise, her development will track where it is supposed to, but more important, she will realize that life is good because you love her. You are her introduction to love; you are love itself."

(Meg Meeker, MD, author of "Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters")

POSSIBLE ACTION POINTS

(This week, how can I put into action what I've learned from this discussion?)

- As the passage suggests, every night let my daughter know she is special and so is her wedding night.
- Spend time on the piano with my daughter, complimenting her on how much she's improved and acknowledging her efforts
- Let my son observe the respect I pay my wife and daughter through chivalrous acts (such as "ladies first" or opening the door).
- My idea...

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Matthew 10: 17-22
- 1 Samuel 17
- Catechism, number 1805-1809

