

Five Staccato Commands For Men

Doug Bytwerk is a preacher buddy of mine who pastors our CB church in Spring Lake. We get together for lunch about once a month to yak about our lives and ministries, and to get each other's perspective on what's bothering us. It's been a good friendship for a long time.

The last time we were together he told me about a conversation he had with his son, Dave. Dave is a deputy sheriff in Ottawa County. Because he's done a lot of work in drug enforcement, people sometimes ask Dave how we're doing in the war on drugs. Dave told his dad, "I tell them if they want to worry about something, don't worry about drugs. Worry about the growing consequences of the pandemic of poor parenting." Dave said the impact on upcoming generations of parental neglect and the attitude that my kid can do no wrong will dwarf the drug issue.

Then Dave told the story of a stop he made on a car full of teens. They all had marijuana on them and all had been smoking. Instead of arresting one particular young man in the car, Dave decided to take him home and inform his parents. The boy didn't have a record and Dave hoped this might set him straight.

When he explained the situation to the boy's parents, the boy's dad got in his face and demanded to know, "Did you actually see my son put a joint in his mouth and inhale?"

My Johnny can do no wrong!

At that, Dave arrested the young man and took him to jail. He said too many young people are growing up with the expectation that they can get away with anything. They get it from their parents. As a law enforcement officer, he finds that deeply disturbing.

Happy Father's Day!

Dads, we live in challenging times. The cultural atmosphere in which our kids are growing up can be toxic to their souls. Our kids catch the cultural currents and they will test the waters at home. Being a dad in any generation has always been a demanding undertaking. Ours has particular challenges that keep us off balance. This world is no friend of grace.

The Apostle Paul has a brief word uniquely applicable to dads like us. When Paul concluded his letter to the Church in Corinth, he included a staccato burst of exhortations that have testosterone all over them. In the context, he is writing to the whole church, but these words have a specific appeal for men. This morning we want to focus their impact on the job of being a dad. Turn with me to 1 Cor. 16:13-14. Men, let's read this out loud together: "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love [Hooah!]."

There are five commands, so we can only touch on each briefly. But don't abbreviate their impact. They speak to us powerfully.

- Be on your guard – ALERT

Guard duty in the military demands constant vigilance. Dads, we're always on station. That doesn't mean we cultivate an authoritarian atmosphere of suspicion in the home where we interrogate everything. It does mean that we pay attention to our kids and monitor what's happening to them, in them and around them.

The Bible commends alertness on several fronts. Peter warned us to be on guard against the evil influences of Satan. Paul warned spiritual leaders to watch out for the evil influences of

people who distort truth to draw believers away from the faith (1 Peter 5:8; Acts 20:29-31).

Dads, be alert for the attacks of the enemy on your kids. Satan is a liar and the father of lies. He will do everything in his power to get your kids hooked into the values and assumptions of this present evil age. He will seduce them with the false promises of hyper-reality—the super-sized illusion that life can be and therefore must be exciting, energizing and fulfilling all the time. He will infect them with the deceptive notion that they must always have only good things, good times and good experiences with no accountability for their conduct and choices. He will excite them with the lie that the best times are found outside the boundaries of godly morality and virtue.

Just one ‘for instance.’ Satan employs all the compelling means our world uses to define our culture. For us the popular media and the internet—even the social networking sites—are among the primary delivery systems.

Please don’t hear this as an unqualified, boilerplate rant against the media. We aren’t suggesting an inquisition. You don’t have to take a sledge hammer to your TV or throw your computers out the window. We are suggesting, Dads, that we stay alert to what we’re letting into our homes that influences our kids. We’re suggesting that we be aware of the impact and be willing to help our kids evaluate what they’re experiencing from a biblical perspective.

And there is one other place where the Bible commends being on guard: “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful [on guard; alert] and thankful” (Colossians 4:2). Dads, pray for your kids. I talked to a father once whose adolescent girl was testing some boundaries. She wasn’t following Christ and the trend was ominous. This dad said that he and his wife had committed themselves to pray fervently and regularly for her. He credits that commitment to prayer as the primary cause for her return to faith.

Stay on station, Dads. Be alert.

- Stand firm in the faith – STEADFAST

How many times have you watched war movies in which men are preparing for battle. The enemy is approaching and death may come to any one of them in the battle that is imminent.

What do the officers say? “Steady men. Stand your ground. Stand fast.”

Dads, stand firm—in your faith!

When Paul wrote the church in Philippi, he began chapter four with these words: “Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends” (Philippians 4:1)!

He’s making an obvious reference to everything he had just written in chapter three. In chapter three Paul offered at least four challenges: place no confidence in our sinful human nature; hold the knowledge of Christ as our highest value; never settle—keep pressing on; maintain an upward focus—don’t become a slave to earthly appetites. “...that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.”

Dads, stick to Jesus and don’t compromise your faith. Live what you believe. Let the message of Christ permeate your character, your attitudes and your behavior in such a way that your confession of faith has integrity.

We are told that roughly two-thirds of the kids now in our Sunday School will walk away from Christianity. Some have already checked out. Many will never look back.

Make sure, men, they aren’t rejecting a caricature of the faith because of what they see at home. Make sure your kids experience a follower of Jesus who has the real goods.

Steady men. Stand firm!

- Be men of courage – MANLY

I love the elegance of the old KJV translation: “Quit ye like men.” In Paul’s language, this sentence is a single word, a verb. We don’t have a verb that exactly expresses this.

Dads, play the man. Man up! This is a word that calls us to engage the unique strengths of our masculine souls. It summons us to wise initiative and manly courage, to be champions and protectors of our kids. In other words, don’t wimp out.

Radical elements in our culture have reacted against men who have abused their position and power to dominate their families and others. They have wrongly identified virile masculine traits as the culprit and sought to tame the beast by what is sometimes called the feminizing of men. The resulting confusion has left many men uncertain about their role and the value of powerful currents they feel in their souls.

The problem is not with the strengths of the masculine soul, but the sinfulness of the human heart. Men who follow Christ authentically can be set free from their native selfishness and passions to offer their God-given maleness as a gift to their families by the power of God’s Spirit.

Dads, walk with Christ and man up!

- Be strong – STRONG

Paul isn’t urging us to hit the gym, men. He is calling us to strength of character that comes from the indwelling presence of Jesus. Listen to what Paul wrote to the Church in Ephesus: “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:16-17). And again: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Ephesians 6:10).

Dads need to be strong on the inside because it’s tough being a dad. We need strength:

- to face down the tyranny of our kids who sometimes think that their right to privacy and choice is absolute.
- to choose right things over easy things.
- to conquer our own sinful passions and temptations.

We don’t get this kind of strength on a weight bench. We get it on our knees. It’s a gift from the indwelling Spirit of Jesus.

Be strong.

And to make sure that strength is godly strength, be loving.

- Do everything in love – LOVING

Men, this is where we check out, right? Isn’t the call to love an invitation to get in touch with our feminine side? WRONG!

The love that comes from God determines to act for the benefit of others at all costs. It is a love that demands the very best parts of our masculinity.

The US Army has identified seven values they seek to instill in every recruit: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. These shape the military culture. But listen to how they define two of them:

- RESPECT: Treat people as they should be treated. In the Soldier’s Code, we pledge to “treat others with dignity and respect while expecting others to do the same.”

On one Army web site, they even invoked the Golden Rule of Christ as a way to define what they mean by respect.

- ▶ SELFLESS SERVICE: Put the welfare of the Nation, the Army and your subordinates before your own.

These two statements go a long ways toward describing the kind of love to which Christ calls men in his service. Dads, treat your kids as they should be treated. Strive to be the dad your kids need.

Put your kid's welfare before your own. Hear that carefully. We did not say, "Put your kids whims before your own." Putting their welfare before your own sometimes means taking the heat for saying "No!" in no uncertain terms and making it stick! Loving our kids means we don't bail on them.

Take Jesus as your model of self-sacrificing love. As you build into your lives alertness, steadfastness, manly courage, and spiritual strength, cultivate a heart of love. The Bible says that a man who is rooted and established in the love of Christ, gets filled up with God's fulness.

We live in a world where men like this stand out. Simply by being faithful husbands and fathers, by paying attention to their kids and offering them courage, strength, protection and godly integrity, they radiate Christ's presence in their homes and in their communities.

The Bible expresses the desire that Christ-followers be "...blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe" (Philippians 2:15).

Men who accept the challenge of this text are brilliant!

Dads, in the gathering darkness overshadowed by a pandemic of poor parenting, shine. "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love."

Benediction:

"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word" (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).