

## CATCHING A FATHER'S BLESSING...

---

### CHAPTER ONE

I remember playing catch with my father.

There is something special about a father playing catch with a child. Or putting that child up on his shoulders, making her feel like she's on top of the world. Or simply holding her hand, she feeling so small, but so safe in the hands of a father who loves her.

That's part of the blessing, the touch. And we all need a blessing.

My father knew this. He was a big, strong man. Most of us who had good fathers remember them as big, strong men – at least when seeing them through our eyes, the eyes of a child. I couldn't imagine anyone throwing a baseball harder than my father did when we played catch on our immaculate lawn. My mitt would POP and my hand would ache as I caught what I thought was his best fastball. Best of all, my confidence would soar. My father's name was Vernon Glass, and he was a good pitcher, a real pitcher. He had played professionally in the Class AA Texas League. He was a lefthander with a fastball that whistled through the air, the batters heard the WHOOSH. Our family lore was my father quit minor league baseball so he could get a job that paid better and raise a family. We believe he would have made the Major Leagues if he had stuck with it, but who knows?

The point is my father was a real pitcher, and he was playing catch with me. He probably wasn't using anything close to his best stuff, but that didn't matter. He threw. His ball was a white BLUR, a WHOOSH, a SLAP against my leather glove. And I caught it.

When our game of catch was over, he'd put his arm around me and we'd walk into the house together, both smiling. He was my father and I knew he loved me, no matter what.

This is what we all want, a parent's blessing.

My father knew this. Most nights, he'd come to my bed. He'd rub my back, or at least run his giant hand through my hair. He'd always say that he was proud of me, that I was a fine boy. Then, he'd kiss me. This enormous, physical man was the epitome of masculinity. But he was smart enough and loving enough to know his son needed to be hugged, kissed and told that he was wonderful. Not just once, every night. No matter if the day had been good or bad for us, his last words were those of affirmation and love. I remember him spanking me only once. My older brother was an all-state quarterback in high school. I loved his All-Star jacket, and I knew that I wasn't supposed to wear it. I was *told* by Dad to not even *think* about putting it on. The jacket belonged to my brother. One day, I took it to school and wore it proudly. When my father came home from work, he took off his belt and whacked me. I'm sure it was not very hard, and only a few times. But it did sting. My father had an Irish temper. His face would turn scarlet, his neck would bulge, you were sure he was about to burst a blood vessel. For a few minutes, he'd yell and rant and carry on...and a few minutes later, he'd come back and apologize. He knew he had a bad temper and hated when he lost control.

We knew about the temper, too.

That's why he could keep my brother, my sister and me in line with just his *stare*. It was the kind of look that could stop a roaring freight train with one hard, Vernon Glass glance. It hurt worse than any spanking, because we knew it meant we had disappointed him, and we hated to let down the man who loved us so much. His stare was more

frightening than any scream. His stare also was a way to say that he cared about us, about what we were doing, and about teaching us the right way to grow up. But every night, that stare was gone when he came into our bedroom. This was when he reminded us that we mattered to him. That also was a way of making us know that we mattered to God, a God who loved us like our father. I wouldn't realize that until much later, but my father's love made it easier for me to love God...trust in God...have a relationship with God. Too many men won't do this with their children, especially their sons. They're almost afraid to tell their children, especially the sons, that they are loved. In some cases, their own fathers didn't deliver that crucial message. Or they may fear they'll be seen as soft and unmanly if they treated their own children with that kind of love. My father was a professional athlete, and later, a hard-driving business man, but his heart was big enough to bless us. He spoke to our hearts with words of love, words of acceptance. He used words that made a difference in my life. Since then, I've learned that so many people have never heard these healing words.

I played in the National Football League for 11 years, with the Cleveland Browns and Detroit Lions. I was a member of four Pro Bowl teams. I was a defensive end, where I fought with huge lineman so I could get to the guy with the ball and throw him to the turf. I'm blessed to still have the Cleveland Browns record for quarterback sacks in a season. There were some games that were nothing more than brawls, hand-to-hand combat. I'm not talking about dirty play, but hard, physical, demanding – and yes, manly – battles. But I've learned from my own father that I need to be tender and loving with my children, and I'm not afraid to show it. Nor do I care who knows it. That's because we all need a blessing.

You may not have had a parent who blessed you; a parent who said, “No matter what, I’ll always love you.”

Maybe you didn’t have a father who protected you, or a father who thought you were special, and told you so. You may think, “I didn’t have that, but I turned out all right.”

Don’t bet on it. Take a moment, search deep inside and take a chance of finding a little hole in your heart that still needs to be filled. Don’t deny the pain. The only way to heal is to first admit you are hurting. Unless you had a father bless you -- or someone who stepped in and became your spiritual father – you have an ache in your soul, a hole in your heart. If you’re completely honest with yourself, you know this is true. You know it during those nights you stare at the ceiling and wonder if anyone will ever love and believe in you. Those nights when you’re so exhausted, yet can’t sleep. Those nights when you know something is wrong, but you’re not sure what.

It’s the longing for the approval of the Father, both on earth and heaven.

Words matter.

Words can bless or bleed.

Words spoken are very hard to take back.

I’ve heard parents say almost flippantly, “You’re stupid.”

Or, “Don’t be so dumb.”

Or, “You’re so irritating.”

Some parents believe these words will make the child shape up and fly right. It’s like a challenge, the parent saying, “Prove me wrong.” All they do is injure the self-image of the child. What a dad whispers in a child’s ear sounds like a scream, and the message can heal or wound. A parent’s voice is a megaphone straight to the heart of the child.

My own son, Bobby, said to me, “Remember when you yelled at me?”

I don't remember it that way. I know I didn't yell, I only said something very quietly and calmly – yet, in his mind, that was screaming in his ear. I was always very careful never to make negative statements to my children. Even since they've been adults, I've noticed that they are very anxious to hear only positive words from me. So I've made an art form of saying things that lift them up, not tear them down. They are now in middle age, and they still want – and need – a blessing from their father! Even now that I have to physically look up to my own sons. Words we heard as children can haunt us into adulthood. Words that blessed us as children can accompany us into old age, long after the person who spoke them into our lives has died. The book of John opens by telling us, “In the beginning was the word.” God spoke the world into being. Creation was accomplished through the spoken word of God. And we can speak life into the souls and hearts of our children.

Words are how we are to begin blessing our children, as my own father demonstrated. He died at the age of 45. I was 14. I still remember his presence, his words, his touch, his blessing.

Jim Sundberg heard me talking like this one day in a chapel service when he was playing for the Texas Rangers. He was their star catcher and he came up to me after my message and said, “What you say is true, Bill, because I remember when I was a little boy my daddy would say, ‘You're going to be a great major league catcher.’ And I said, ‘But Dad, I threw the ball over the second baseman's head.’ My dad said, ‘Yes, you've got a terrific arm.’ And I'd say, ‘But Dad, I struck out,’ and he'd say, ‘What a swing – what a

swing.’ No matter what I did, he turned it to reinforce his dream and it became my dream as well.”

Parents can inspire or destroy dreams in a single sentence. Children don’t need parents to act like coaches because coaches usually praise, then withhold the blessing. They do this to squeeze just a little more out of the athlete. This might work in sports, but not at home. Children need a parent, especially a father, who speaks the words of love, hope and belonging into their lives. Even if you don’t know how, or if this sounds strange to you, your children need it. And you can do it.

In fact, you must do it!

The future of your children...and your children’s children...and even their children depends upon it.

Numbers 14:18 reads: “God does not leave the guilty unpunished, he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations.”

What happens to our children? Our children’s children? Their children and the generations to follow? It can begin with us.

How do we do that?

Consider this from Deuteronomy 7:9: “The Lord your God is God. He is the faithful God keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations for those who love him and keep His commandments.”

How do we do that?

We love and bless our children.

END