

Russell Kelfer

**In the
Easy Chair
at Home**

1224-B

Series: I Timothy

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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In the Easy Chair at Home

“Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home”. No place like home indeed. There you are, Mr. Christian, propped up in your easy chair, your multi-purpose remote control in hand, your cordless phone by your side, your VCR set to go on and to record that old movie on channel 949, while you watch the baseball game on channel 816. Nearby, of course, is your faithful wife. She is in the kitchen using her new Cuisinart to do to vegetables what wasn’t possible before. Supper is silently radiating its way to the dinner table as the microwave comes on automatically, sensing the temperature of the frozen delight that came straight from that block-long grocery emporium up the street. At precisely the right time, it will turn itself on and cook your dinner just the way you like it.

The children are fighting boredom in the bedroom using their own television sets to invade the wonderful world of Nintendo. Bullets are flying, wild colors are racing across the screen, and noises are shrieking out of that Sony that sound as though they belong on another planet. By your side is Famous Fido your faithful dog, who has just come from Venny the Vet, where he was washed, curled, ironed, perfumed, and vaccinated all in one fell swoop. His new prescription dog food awaits him in the kitchen. It is designed to keep his doggie cholesterol down and your bank balance down, as well. It would be cheaper to buy the dog a pass to McDonalds, but, alas, not as healthy.

In the driveway is the “family sportscar”; a title that really makes no sense at all. It belongs to GMAC, but you get to drive it. You do, that is, except when mom and the kids want to...which is always. It holds three comfortably, but seven continually. The trunk folds down replacing the back seat, thus allowing you room for your briefcase and two pieces of paper (8 ½ x11 maximum).

Your swimming pool is automatically chlorinating itself, sweeping itself, and polluting itself. Your multi-purpose

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thermostat goes on and off at predetermined intervals keeping your house at just the right temperature and your gas and light bill at just below the national debt.

The computer in the den is wired to the one at your office downtown, which is probably wired to who knows what. With a lot of patience, which you don't have, you've learned to type a letter using "Word Perfect", but your letters have too many words, and they aren't perfect. Your children can do their homework, though, by calling CompuServe and asking, for example, for the latest information on the American Revolution. Just what might be new about the American Revolution you don't know, but it fills the screen, and you get charged for it, and everyone's happy... especially the kids.

This is home, American style, in the twenty-first century. It is electronically wired, ergonomically designed, and economically ridiculous. At any rate, there you are living as the "king of the hill" in your urban kingdom of perfection. Well, perhaps not quite perfection. Two of the kids need braces, and the dentist wants a lien on the house. The third kid hasn't come out from under his headphones in three months, so you're not quite sure he's alive.

The couple next door is getting a divorce, and you've been subpoenaed to testify that they are the ideal American couple who just can't get along. Your youngest daughter is screaming at her mother, "I won't wear that old dress another time. It's three weeks old". Your middle child just brought home a report card from school, and either they've dropped "A's" and "B's" from the alphabet, or he's in big trouble. You've grounded him, which makes your life more miserable than it does his.

Your mother-in-law is coming for an "extended" visit, a term which has come to mean something like a jail sentence for her and for you. You and your wife haven't spoken to each other for three days since she ran the MasterCard past its limits and ran the car into the back fence, while trying to put lipstick on and back out of the driveway simultaneously. She succeeded at neither.

Your boss just called, and there is a command performance set for tomorrow morning, something to do with a "realignment of positions" and a need to "consolidate the workforce" to accommodate a "changing economy". In English, that means "business is bad; and somebody's got to go" (probably you). You

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don't know what to hope for, except that the rapture will come and end it all.

What's wrong with this picture? There you are, the "head" of the household of a thriving, growing family in what is technologically and economically one of the most exciting times in history. You have more gadgets than the local electronics store, more credit than some banks; and more free time than some kids do in the summer. You ought to be the envy of all of the ages of fathers before you who must be up in heaven wondering what in the world you're going to buy at the discount appliance store next, and when your golf score is going to improve.

But underneath it all there is an undercurrent of pressure, a sense of futility, a pattern of panic. Here is the "All-American" family who *has it all*, yet isn't sure that what it has is what it wanted. Somehow in the race to arrive in the electronic age, you've won the battle, and lost the war. You have everything the Jones' have, but you don't have the kind of family you dreamed of when you said, "I Do". There is so much confusion, so much independence, so much selfishness. There is such a race for the children to grow up before they *are* grown up. There is so much conversation about spiritual things, but the quest is for that which is material, and the kids don't listen to what they hear; they listen to what they see. What they see is a life built around acceptance, success, intensity, and temporal values.

I wonder what Paul would have said to today's father? I wonder how he would assess the duplicity with which most of us face our priorities. I wonder if he would have drawn any lines or placed any limits on what God's man could or couldn't do. I wonder.

We really don't need to wonder. In his first letter to young Timothy, when Tim was stationed in Ephesus to correct and redirect this erring fellowship. He was interviewing the men in the church for the offices of elder and deacon. He was outlining, in the process, a list of the qualifications and qualities necessary for a man of God to lead the church of God.

We have been working our way, ever so slowly to be sure, and have come to the final three issues. We are past the issues of character (who we are), and behavior (how we act), and we have embarked on the final section about what time will reveal about our lives. In that arena, we saw Paul take five phrases and with them demonstrate how the man of God looks as time goes by.

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In our last study, we looked at how God's man looks in the marketplace. He has a "blameless" reputation among those who are outside the Body of Christ. The non-believers he comes in contact with see the nature of God in his responses and the heart of God in his desires. His tongue demonstrates the consistency of God's Word. His moral choices demonstrate God's holiness. The absence of unrighteous anger demonstrates God's patience. The ethics he holds to *in spite of the pressure around him* demonstrate God's righteousness. The submissive way he responds to authority demonstrates his confidence in God's sovereignty. The way he reaches out and touches the lives of those around him demonstrates the love of God to all whom he comes in contact. In other words, those on the "outside, lookin' in" see God when they see the man of God, and the result is a heart ripe for the Gospel to penetrate.

Today we look in on the man of God as he sits in the "easy chair" at home. The TV is blaring; the VCR is recording; the kids are rebelling; the neighbors are complaining; the bank account is straining; and the world is looking on, trying to see if his responses are any different than theirs.

The home is the last place spirituality becomes consistent. At church, *you have to look spiritual*. It's in the rulebook. It's *expected of you*. When people ask how you feel, you answer "Praise the Lord" even if you're so angry with God you want out of this planet. When people ask how you're doing spiritually, you always say "Great" even if you're dying inside, because you know that a) they don't really want to know, and b) if you tell the truth, you'll get voted out of the inner circle of spiritual giants.

At work, you hold your own when you can, because so much is at stake. It isn't *acceptable* to do otherwise. So you wait until you get home. It's 5:30 in the evening; and there you are. The King Kong of suburbia arrives home in his chariot, throws down his briefcase, turns on the news, and *dares anyone to speak*. And then you find out that Junior blew out one of your new \$150 Pirelli tires running over the neighbor's bike; or his sister let the washer overflow, ruining the downstairs carpet; or your wife, who had a day that could have been written into "Days of our Lives" tears into you over nothing, and you lose it...I mean you lose it big time.

Super spiritual daddy turns into Ivan the Terrible. The

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transformation is instant, but impossible to overlook. You scream; you turn red; you turn blue; you turn to using words your family didn't know you knew. And then you have the job of explaining, of apologizing, of trying to restore confidence. Home is the toughest place of all to be consistent...because it's the one place you want to let off steam, to be yourself, to stop pretending.

Paul doesn't think that's such a good idea. He thinks home is supposed to be where you *are* what the world and the church *thinks* you are. Which brings us, of course, to the three-fold portrait of God's man in the home, *standing the test of time*. This brings us to our simple outline:

I- In the Easy Chair at Home

II- The Servant at Home

III- The Boss at Home

IV- The Host at Home

II- THE SERVANT AT HOME

If you recall, Paul has already dealt with the first of man's responsibilities in the home...that of being a "one-woman sort of man". He is to love his wife as Christ loved the church, unconditionally, impartially, unendingly. So his first responsibility as he enters those hallowed doors at 111 Suburbia Blvd. is to find his wife's needs...to ask how *her day went*, to find out how *she is feeling*, to see if there is anything he can do to ease the pain in her life at the moment. It doesn't matter how tired he is, how frustrated he is, how fearful he is. *At the moment*, his first responsibility ought to be to the one he is to be constantly in a state of dying for...the one he is to be dying to self for, dying to the world for, if need be, dying for...period. That's God's man. She is not to be the one he takes out his anger on because of the boss, or because of that insensitive client, or because the car broke down. He is to give his life for her, which means *giving his life up for her*. Therefore, what has happened to him takes a backseat while he finds out if she is hurting. If she is, he is to hurt with her; he is to hurt for her; and he is to try, if possible, to ease her pain. He is a one-woman man, and his one woman comes first. His evening news ought to come first from channel one...the one he gave his heart to. He has come home not to be king; but to do as the King of Glory did when He came to earth. He gave up his rights to be king in order to don the cloak of a servant. That's how God's man is to think of his home; not as his castle...but as

his place of service.

III- THE BOSS AT HOME

But strangely enough, this one who is to be the servant at home, still has to be the boss at home. He is to be the captain of the ship, a humble captain, a serving captain to be sure; but he is to be the captain. He is to take his responsibilities seriously and, in particular, his responsibilities where the children are concerned. They are not “Momma’s responsibility”. And here is where so many fathers play “hide and seek”. They hide when the kids need to be disciplined and seek to lateral the ball to mom saying, “You take care of them.” The result is confusion in the children and resentment in the wife. Paul has an answer for this: God’s man must be

one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence

(for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);

(I Timothy 3:4 NKJV)

Now I found that passage in a Bible in the library. It wasn’t in mine. I cut it out with scissors when my kids were small, 70 or 80 years ago. [*Russell’s humor of course.*] But it is in most translations that haven’t been tampered with. I cut it out because I didn’t want to deal with it. I don’t recommend doing that. It is a specific requirement with specific consequences.

Some of the words need investigating:

1- The word “rule” (*proistemi*) means “to superintend; to preside over; to be responsible for”.

It means to accept the role to which you have been called. It also means that, having accepted the role, you assume the role. You learn the duties and faithfully perform them.

2- The word “own” (*idios*) means “a personal, particular household that belongs to him”.

This is not speaking of how the man leads at church or in the office, or even how well he teaches others to lead. It is referring to his own particular, unique household; the one God has made him responsible for. He is particularly responsible for the “children”... those “born ones” placed in his care by a sovereign God.

3- The word “subjection” (*hupotasso*) is “to subordinate or

arrange under”.

This means those children are to be under his authority and know it. There is to be no doubt about who is in charge. There is to be no doubt who calls the final shots. Dad does, and if Dad doesn't, he's not doing what he was called to do.

4- The word “gravity” (*semnotos*) means “dignity, majesty, solemnly, honestly”.

This is an unusual word. He is to have his children in subjection *with all gravity*. The word literally means with such dignity that they are given respect. So the *manner in which Dad is to rule* is not in the role of dictator, or despot, but as one whose standards are so clear and whose love is so real that he earns their respect even as he applies the “board of education to the seat of the problem”. One translator phrases it, “he respects his children and they in turn, respect him.” Love, of course, demands discipline. The writer of Hebrews 12 worded it this way:

For when he [God] punishes you, it proves that he loves you.
When he whips you, it proves you are really His child.

(Hebrews 12:6 The Living Bible)

And it is assumed that we as earthly parents will do the same:

Since we respect our fathers here on earth, though they
punish us, should we not all the more cheerfully submit to
God's training so that we can begin to really live?

(Hebrews 12:9 TLB)

The phrase then says, “God is looking for men who are presiding over their own households with dignity, showing respect and receiving it.”

The question is asked, “Does that mean his children won't rebel?” Some say so. Others say no. It obviously means that while the children are in the home and young enough to control, the father must exercise the responsibilities appointed to him, that of bringing the children in subjection, with all dignity and love. There has only been, however, one perfect parent. His Name is Jehovah God. He always disciplines correctly, always loves completely, always plans perfectly. But it was Jehovah who wrote of His own parenting in Isaiah 1:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the LORD has
spoken: “I have nourished and brought up children, And
they have rebelled against Me;”

(Isaiah 1:2 NKJV)

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Does that mean that God is unfit to rule the church? Not hardly. No, the issue isn't the *result of the child's choices*. The issue is the faithfulness of the father's rule. God's man must be exercising his authority with dignity in the home. He must be loving to his wife, no matter what; and he must be ruling his children, no matter what. He can't control his wife's responses but he must keep on loving her. He can't control his children's responses but he must keep on ruling them. Otherwise, he is not leadership material. Paul goes on to explain why:

(for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) (I Timothy 3:5 NKJV)

The question illustrates the parable of the steward. If a man is not faithful in what he has been given, his family, why should you entrust to him the responsibilities of the family of God?

Many a man my age (senior citizens, I think is the new word for our generation) would like to have those years back when the little ones were little ones. Instead, we must be content to spoil our grandchildren with the confidence that they aren't our responsibility, so we don't have to rule them. But we can't go back and do it again. We can only encourage those who are coming along behind us. Make your family your number one priority. Pay careful attention to each child. Learn who he is. Learn who she is. Learn why they are like they are. Love them uniquely. Discipline them consistently. Pray for them continually. And then rest. The final results aren't up to you. They have free wills, and you have a sovereign God. But, ah, the responsibility to "rule well your own home", men, is up to you. And the qualities necessary to do that are the same qualities needed to lead the church.

IV- THE HOST AT HOME

There is one more admonition from the apostle that indicates a certain level of spiritual maturity. It's an issue I struggle with as much as the other two. It's the issue of hospitality.

A bishop must be given to hospitality

The word "hospitality" is the word *philoxenon*. "Philos" means "to be fond of" "xenos" means "a stranger, or foreigner". So it literally means "one who is fond of offering hospitality". Fortunately, this phrase doesn't mean that to be a Christian leader you must be always ready to host a party, or live for after-church fellowships. This kind of hospitality had a deeper

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meaning. In Paul's day, many Christians because of persecution were homeless and stranded with no place to stay. A godly man would be so selfless that, if need be, he would sleep outside rather than see God's people without a place to stay. There were also traveling preachers and evangelists who needed lodging. The godly man wanted his children to know them. He wanted the church to have their wisdom. So his home was their home, so to speak. He was the first to offer hospitality. He didn't clutch at his privacy or his possessions. He didn't sit in his easy chair watching television, *even Christian television*, if there was someone in the Body of Christ who needed a place to stay. He was a man of *hospitality*. This is hard for me, and I know it is for many of you. Men who work outside the home for long hours often want to come home and unwind and not have to entertain strangers. But Hebrews 13:2 reminds us that sometimes when we entertain strangers, we entertain angels. It indicates that God sometimes tests our generosity by sending someone who needs a place to stay, *just to see where our heart is*. It may be an angel who has come to test us or just to bless us. In either case, to refuse or to accept grudgingly is to indicate a need in our hearts that disqualifies us for leadership.

So God's man is not the king of the hill in his easy chair ruling his domain of entertainment with his remote control. He is his wife's servant, giving himself away to meet her every need. He is responsible for his children—responsible to know them, to understand them, to love them, to discipline them, to teach them, to pray for them, and then to leave them in the hands of a sovereign God. He is also to be the man whose door is open because his heart is open. He entertains strangers because they are God's angels, and because by welcoming them, he is welcoming God.

He may be so effective at the office that he is the most respected businessman in town. He may be so spiritual at church that he is considered the epitome of godliness. But if he doesn't have it at home, he doesn't have it. If he can't be husband, father, and host in his own household, how can he be to the flock of God, shepherd, leader, teacher, or friend?

With every passing year it gets tougher. Today's dad has to compete with a society that is so affluent that keeping up with the Jones' may require two jobs and a working wife. He has to compete with a technological explosion so intense that his whole

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house beeps and flashes and goes on and off electronically and automatically. He has to compete with computers for knowledge and speed, and he can't. His children are taught in school and by the media that authority is obsolete and discipline is unfair. His wife is surrounded by magazines and electronic images on television of a woman who cannot be a woman, unless she does her own thing, and becomes her own person apart from her husband who must not exercise authority over her.

His neighbors scoff at his standards; his parents and in-laws may even join in. If ever there was a generation where God's man must stand alone, this is it. And if ever there was a place where the standing is tough, it's in the home where God's Word indicates the Gospel is to be passed from generation to generation—by word and by deed.

You can't raise your family from your easy chair in front of your RCA, your VCR, or your IBM. You can no longer expect the church to do it for you, or the school to do it for you, *even the Christian school*. It's your job, Mr. Christian father and husband, and it's your job for life.

The good news is that when you assume the role God designed for you, God assumes responsibility for the outcome. It may not all turn out the way you would like, but that's not your problem. You will have met the challenge by having obeyed the word. And no matter how it turns out on planet earth, you will be rewarded when you meet your Blessed Lord in Glory, and He with open arms *calls you by name* and says, "Well done, thou good and faithful husband; well done thou good and faithful father..you have been faithful in your household...I will make you ruler over many. Enter into the joy of the Lord."¹

It won't be all joy here. There will be some weeping, some praying, some mourning. Ah, but *it will be worth it all*. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."² And that joy awaits the man who trades in his easy chair for a difficult task...the task of being God's man in the home.

Let's pray.

¹ Matthew 25:21,23

² Psalm 30:5b (NKJV)

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Our Father and our God,

We worship You. Oh, perfect Father, the one who never stops loving, no matter what; perfect Husband, the one who will never ever stop loving us; perfect Friend, one whose arm about us is always available to listen to us whenever we call; we worship You. But, oh, righteous God, we recognize, as well, that You have a plan and a purpose for the godly man. And we recognize that plan and that purpose are not circumstantial but they are spiritual and it requires obedience.

Father, even in this room today there are men who are hurting, grieving, deeply wounded, struggling, weeping, and all of us know, Father, that it's just not easy. But we crawl up into the hands of our wonderful heavenly Father, even this morning, and praise You that the weeping only endures for a night and joy does come in the morning. We simply pray this morning, Father, that those of us who are Christian men might leave with more resolve by your grace, to be the men we are called to be.

In Jesus Name,

Amen.

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(06.28.16.dvd)