

June 30, 2008

To: Prayer List (Billy Graham Evangelical Association)

From: Kirk Rainer
St. Johns Detention Center
St. Augustine, FL

Subject: "Former Father", Part I; "Being a Good Father", Religion Section, The St-Augustine Record, May 23rd, 2008

I am writing to express my thanks for the touching letter from the father who is unable to see his children, and to request prayer for my present circumstances. As a father who is unable to see his children, I can empathize – as I have been estranged for seven years and, at present, have been arrested for aggravated stalking.

During most of the seven years, I have prayed for reconciliation with my former wife, and have appealed in kind to the courts; yet without any apparent progress, but instead, further erosion to a once healthy parent-child relationship and the current charge that could destroy my engineering profession and my ability to continue paying child support.

Much more could be said, and much more has been written on the seriousness and the sorrow of the estrangement – both in regard to the sources of misinformation and the mishandling of credible evidence or information.

Aggravated stalking represents a domestic crime whereby the victim(s) claim that a threat of bodily harm – or even death – has occurred; and that the victim(s) has incurred substantial emotional distress as a consequence. The seriousness of such a charge and the consequences should be evident; but as with the description of parental alienation or estrangement, the sorrow could be evident in claims that are without merit or are otherwise false.

I ask you to pray that justice will be served in this case; that the truth will be presented and respected over pretense, misinformation, or otherwise falsehoods. Still, with all that has happened to doubt such a possibility, your question remains:

"How can you be a better father?"

July 10, 2008

To: Prayer List (Billy Graham Evangelical Association)

From: Kirk Rainer
St. Johns Detention Center
St. Augustine, FL

Subject: "Faraway Father", Part II; "Being a Good Father", Religion Section, The St-Augustine Record, May 23rd, 2008

To keep you informed of my legal case, I am writing "Part II" in response to your article/column "Being a Good Father" published in the local paper. You may recall me as the father who has been alienated from his children for seven (7) years; and is presently embroiled in a legal case of aggravated stalking pertaining to my former wife and two of my children.

The arraignment was ostensibly to enter a plea of which I plead non-guilty – based on the fact that I have not (nor would I) threaten my former wife and/or children with bodily harm or death. Besides the plea was the opportunity to speak to the judge and to be assigned a tentative public defender. I could have spent much more time before the judge, but with limited time, was able to understand the procedures (for the trial) and to express my concerns.

A chief concern is that I will likely spend six (6) months waiting for a trial; and with this wait, will arrear about \$12,000 of child support. The judge suggested that I hire an attorney (to file a motion for relief); but since I cannot afford an attorney for this case – or bond-out to possibly attain re-employment – the suggestion is not an alternative.

Divorce is often described as "a mess" – and my divorce is only one of so many! Yet I must say, that my divorce as "a mess", is also coupled with the "the madness" that severs not only the father's ability to pay child support – as his only contribution to his children's welfare – but every aspect of parenting beyond prayer. That is why I call upon you to include these (my) children in your prayers concerning this case.

In the context and commentary of this case is the designation of "victim(s)". I agree with the designation as it applies to my children only – but not because of aggravated stalking or anything of the sort – but because of "a mess" and "the madness" that has been inflicted upon them.

"His children are far from safety, crushed in court without a defender".

- Job 5:4

July 20, 2008

To: Prayer List (Billy Graham Evangelical Association)

From: Kirk Rainer
St. Johns Detention Center
St. Augustine, FL

Subject: "Fellow Father", Part III on "Being a Good Father", Religion Section, The St-Augustine Record, May 23rd, 2008

In Part III, I turn my attention away from my case and specific circumstances, and toward some accounts or references to "father"...while in jail. Thinking of many possibilities, I will mention only a few to include the mere mention of "father" to several personal accounts – both sons and/or fathers.

With limited TV viewing, "father" was noted in:

- "Rocky VI" – a confrontation between Rocky and his son includes the endearing words, "watching you grow-up every day was a privilege..."
- "Miami CSI" – one of the regular cast (whose name I do not know) describes being a father as "a gift" (perhaps from God)
- Barack Obama – while speaking to a group of predominately black Americans, describes the social crisis of families (or children) without fathers (as some of you know, the condition is overwhelming with widespread, adverse consequences)

There is much to write about in jail with much sorrow amid much seriousness; in regard to fathers is the frequent brokenness that prevails in the lives of both sons and fathers. Not always sorrow, but often the wayward and wild son whose father is distant or alienated for some reason(s). Then, the father(s) who have long abandoned or been estranged from his children by marriage or out-of-wedlock relationships.

The exception to brokenness has been the young man who frequently pays respect and gratitude to his father – and considers his father to be his best friend. There is a middle-aged son with expressed regrets – but the desire to "come-clean" to please rather than shame his father. Finally, there is the grandfather who has filled the gap to some degree with care and court-related costs. In these exceptions is much promise and potential – where even the sorrow and seriousness can be balanced with the presence of a father, a grandfather, and possibly God, our father.

There is much wealth to be gained in "a gift" or being a father; and in knowing that love, however experienced and applied, is so desperately needed and wanted as *the father, his son, he delights in.*

July 30, 2008

To: Prayer List (Billy Graham Evangelical Association)

From: Kirk Rainer
St. Johns Detention Center
St. Augustine, FL

Subject: "Family Father", Part IV; "Being a Good Father", Religion Section, The St-Augustine Record, May 23rd, 2008

Continuing on the theme of "Being a Good Father", I must give tribute my own father who, through the course of much trial and difficulty, continues to support me prayfully, financially, and in other ways. By this tribute, I do not suggest that he is a replacement for our heavenly father; but rather, he is a blessing and, in ways, a model for me.

As I reflect on his expressions of love, the general belief or impression is that his deeds or actions stand over and above his words. Perhaps because of the commonly applied reason of "his generation", words have never been the common (or natural) language of love; instead, the regularities of responsible parent coupled with the extraordinary manifested in the "trial and difficulty" of divorce as "a mess" and its consequences and aftermath as "the madness".

Dad has never been the type to press his children into a particular activity; but above all has valued education and the basic possibilities of its accomplishments. Perhaps another result or tenet of "his generation" is the value place on education, where words have been most expressed – through still relatively modest if even shared beyond each of us.

As an adult and in disproportion over the last few years, I have learned a great deal about his life from the earliest recollections to his beliefs, his faith. At the same time, these last few years have brought deep emotions, pain and suffering – much of which has been learned (and shared) by words more than actions. All in all has been a deeper relationship and greater appreciations for him – from his experience with "the madness" in his childhood to the present honesty that he expresses in words the regrets, rewards, and sundry of reflections from the casual to the profound.

Recently, he recalled witnessing death as a child: a woman hit by a train and a man electrocuted to death a construction site. In the detail of these recollections was the apparent sense that is, as described in the movie *Amazing Grace*, a thread – it either breaks or it doesn't. Yet beyond that life, he believes in another, and for this, he is a blessing and a model for me.

August 20, 2008

To: Prayer List (Billy Graham Evangelical Association)

From: Kirk Rainer
St. Johns Detention Center
St. Augustine, FL

Subject: "Fore-Father", Part V; "Being a Good Father", Religion Section, The St-Augustine Record, May 23rd, 2008

In Part V, I turn my attention momentarily to the fore – "fathers" of the revolution, and specifically, to the signers of The Declaration. No, I am not trying to compare my circumstances to the historical event, but I am introducing some irony to set-the-stage for the basic sufferance termed "taxation without representation".

Just two days before my arrest – and eventual extradition – I stood in the "Old Customs House" in historic Charleston, South Carolina. This building was, at the time of British occupation, a jail; and as learned from the tour, held three of the four Carolinians (signers of the Declaration) prior to their extradition to Saint Augustine.

To honor their sacrifice, I had to consider their circumstances by re-visiting the Declaration. As the "injustices and usurpations" are read, the circumstances are delineated in the backdrop of tyranny as the rule; hence, our patriots are The Crown's rebels.

Turning to Hollywood, while on the same theme, the movie *The Patriot*, starring Mel Gibson – is a personal favorite of mine. His character, Ben Martin, is called to assembly in Charles Towne (or Charleston) and, in conjunction with the introduction of a bill to vote a levy (and commit to the revolution), makes the following statement: "A legislature can crush a man's rights just as easily as a king can..."

It is impossible for me to understand the oppression under which these patriots signed The Declaration and sacrificed so much; as it is impossible for me to understand the oppression of minorities such as the native or African American. Yet I can understand the moral dilemma of "taxation without representation".

As a non-custodial parent, my circumstance has been the obligation of child-support without the privilege of all other aspects of being a parent. For approximately seven (7) years, I have endured this circumstance with all the sense of shame and sufferance that such loss might endure...and might not.

The irony comes as I am presently incarcerated within a few miles from the fort – where the patriots were locked-up. Thankfully, the prayers of many have been lifted-up, and I am at peace because the Lord is ever present with love to solace; and "of thee I sing."

August 30, 2008

To: Prayer List (Billy Graham Evangelical Association)

From: Kirk Rainer
St. Johns Detention Center
St. Augustine, FL

Subject: "Founding Father", Part VI; "Being a Good Father", Religion Section, The St-Augustine Record, May 23rd, 2008

Continuing with the founding fathers; one of the three Carolinians, Thomas Heyward, wrote "Of Thee I Sing" while incarcerated at the Saint Augustine fort. Using the melody of England's national anthem, he formed the words "my country...sweet land of liberty..."

I've had the blessing of recently reading the book, "The Search for Christian America"; and to summarize, the book is an examination of The Revolution and surrounding events such as *The Great Awakening*. The scholastic writers seem to conclude that the United States was not a Christian nation at birth, but included or possessed Christians among the patriots of The Declaration and representing the revivalist of *The Great Awakening*. As the writers indicate, some (Christians) reacted to the present politics (and The Revolution) while others planned for the Kingdom to come; some viewed The Revolution as the means to liberty while others realized that true liberty (freedom) lies in Christ. The concept of liberty seemed to be varied: some considered the present (government) as ample liberty, as compared to other nations, while others obviously did not...

Also varied was the concept of truth as the basis for liberty. The Declaration includes the introduction, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..."; but as critics have pointed out, the reality of "these truths" were not for "all men", citizens or people. Whereas the signers may have conceived liberty as the right of some, Christians may have understood that liberty is indeed for all within the body of Christ; one-concept of truth relevant to some, the other absolute for all.

Yet the relevant concept was the basis for revolution and through a course of human events, resulted in liberty at the cost of death and destruction. As for the absolute concept, the battle wages on – as does the prize of freedom that comes through death and destruction as described below.

Advancing the historical clock, while returning to the "old country", a German-Christian minister, Dietrich Boenhiffer said, "When Jesus calls a man, he bids him come and die." Dietrich died in body as a martyr – opposed to the Nazi Party and firm in the faith of Christ who sets the captive free.

September 10, 2008

To: Prayer List (Billy Graham Evangelical Association)

From: Kirk Rainer
St. Johns Detention Center
St. Augustine, FL

Subject: "Farthing Father", Part VII; "Being a Good Father", Religion Section, The St-Augustine Record, May 23rd, 2008

To continue from the quote (from Dietrich Boenhiffer), the matter or condition of death refers to our sanctification, of course. My intention is using this quote, and entering the subject of death, was as a contrast to political independence; that is, to find freedom or life in Christ's government, we must lose our own life for his...

To lose my life is (or has) not been without pain. Even now, as I continue my stay as a detainee, the pain arises periodically. Momentary feelings of anger or self-pity flood my mind and, though less frequent, the potential shame I've brought on family and friends. And though I truly believe my intentions were good – as to express my love to my children – the backlash or fall-out seems to be an undesired and even regretful consequence.

To somehow associate my actions – or the charges before me – is not that simple wither; for even now, the prosecution has been unable to find (or manufacture) evidence on one of the charges dating back to October 2007! Among the pains endured is the realization of judiciary power gone awry. Just last week, the prosecution entered a second continuation on the premise that I was not in the court room; but they failed to acknowledge that, per court procedure, I was waiting in the holding cells waiting to be ushered into the court room...prior to the case call!

Even in such abuses (or judiciary power) is the blessing that at least some justice may be rendered now; but will most certainly be so by the one true source of justice, our Lord. Given the certainty, I will not have the alibi of insufficient evidence or other technicalities, but must come to the throne with only the righteousness given Christ's atonement, the forgiveness of sins.

In the title of this letter, the use of "farthing" has somewhat of a dual meaning: stretching the meaning of this word, the one meaning is to be far away or distant; the second meaning is to be with little wealth or material possession. If I had a choice of one or the other, I would rather be close or closer to my children – as a parent should be – but in that I do not have a choice, contentment must (and can) still be found in Christ.

Paul speaks of contentment in all conditions and, of course, to include the pains of one sort or another. May I learn from his life that *to live is Christ*.

September 15, 2008

To: Prayer List (Billy Graham Evangelical Association)

From: Kirk Rainer
St. Johns Detention Center
St. Augustine, FL

Subject: "Forgetting Father", Part VIII; "Being a Good Father", Religion Section,
The St-Augustine Record, May 23rd, 2008

Yes, Paul found contentment in the conditions or circumstances of his life; he came to identify the spiritual things of Christ "to far outweigh" the things of the Earth. Laying aside the Earthly things (or forgetting them), he "pressed-on toward the upward call in Christ Jesus.

To read of his mission(s) and to realize his suffering is to know or identify that Paul was living for the Spiritual things (or Christ). Considering Paul's previous life as the persecutor of The Way is even more profound in terms of the transforming and forgiving power to lay aside "the sin that so easily entangles" and to "run with endurance the race marked out for us."

Laying aside or forgetting the past (or everything that hinders...) has not yet occurred for me. I tend to dwell on the occurrences or events of my children – or even marriage and divorce – with more than the healthy form of remembering the good things or times. Gradually, the past is fading and the memories, however accurate in memory, are of the simple, good times.

Of what I've read and heard, remembering the good times is the "healthy" choice of those memories; it is the choice that leads to the burying of feelings and thoughts that may be reminders of an unforgiving heart – with all its consequences. Furthermore, the memory of good times is the recognition of possible blessings of God.

Whether these memories are blessings or not; if dwelling on the past leads to sin than it is an absence or lack of faith. I read of a marquee at a church that read, "Looking behind us brings sorrow; looking around us brings worry; and looking ahead of us brings faith." Though the saying may not be Biblical, it may have some Spiritual truth in that the past – an even present – is not always a beneficial perspective for faith and trust.

I cannot forget the past or I sure cannot ignore the present, but what I can do is ask our Lord to manage this mental and emotional part of my life such that forgiveness is possible – as is necessary for our own forgiveness and restoration in Christ.

I have not forgotten my children – past or present – and they have not forgotten me; but above all, that love would be evident in forgiveness working toward restoration.

September 20, 2008

To: Prayer List (Billy Graham Evangelical Association)

From: Kirk Rainer
St. Johns Detention Center
St. Augustine, FL

Subject: "Forgiving Father", Part IX; "Being a Good Father", Religion Section, The St-Augustine Record, May 23rd, 2008

I have had the recent blessing to acquire the book *Total Forgiveness* by R. T. Kendall. While I have understood the importance – even necessity – to forgive, there is clearly room-to-grow my understanding and practice of Christ-defined forgiveness.

The title of this letter has a two part meaning too: the father who desires to be forgiven but must also forgive...in order to be forgiven.

From the title of this book, "Total Forgiveness" occurs when the past is buried – when the thoughts are no more and the prayers of blessing are in-work for those who have hurt or offended. When total forgiveness or Christ-defined forgiveness begins, so does the freedom to enable love – even for those who purpose to hurt and destroy.

Also included in this process (of forgiveness) is the matter of judging others. The instruction and action of judging seems to draw a fine line between the time to refrain from judging and the time to judge – as judging can reduce the desire or ability to forgive and raise the potential for hurt...

To complicate the process further is the strong possibility that the offender does not know or does not care that they have offended or hurt. Perhaps along the lines of "sins of omission" is the possibility that the offender is not aware for whatever reason; but whether the hurt be known or not, forgiveness should be the objective in obedience and by example of Christ.

How do I forget or, conversely, how do I become sensitive to sin that lead or leads to hurt or an offense to others? It seems that I begin by looking to Christ – the mercy and grace that has and covers my own sins, and though undeserved, the forgiveness that lift the guilt and acquits me from death eternal. As this gift – the gift that keeps on giving – is increasingly appreciated and valued, so too is the process of forgiveness further experienced in my life.

Well, I am not finished with the book – and I am not finished forgiving or being forgiven either – but what I hope and pray is that this process will be ever growing and practiced come what may.

September 25, 2008

To: Prayer List (Billy Graham Evangelical Association)

From: Kirk Rainer
St. Johns Detention Center
St. Augustine, FL

Subject: "Fearing Father", Part X; "Being a Good Father", Religion Section, The St-Augustine Record, May 23rd, 2008

Forgiveness is a process in-the-works; an the process has been the opportunity(s) to learn and grow – even now with my circumstances and the materials that I am reading and studying.

I have learned that fear is a word most frequently used in introductory scripture – often in the form of a praise such as "fear not" or "do not fear". Evidently, God knows the tendency and the destructiveness of fear save the one fear of honoring or revering God.

From the materials (or book) *Total Forgiveness*, fear can coincide with envy and with anger. As recent as yesterday, I was reading of several Biblical accounts where this combination existed or occurred. Whether the anger is directed at someone else and/or at God, it can precipitate from fear.

The book describes fear as the "twin of pride". One character example is King Saul – where pride lead to disobedience intermixed with fear of the apparent rise of David. Both his pride (or fear) and the resulting anger disabled repentance and forgiveness.

Paul tells us that believers have been given a spirit of love...not a timid or fearful spirit; and that the Holy Spirit "pours out his love" into our hearts. "A man after God's own heart, David surrendered his fear(s) to God such that love would prevail – even toward King Saul.

Both in my past and present role as a parent, fear is a stronghold; it strikes spontaneously as in the possibility (or actuality) of danger and, since the divorce, in the unknown. Though I might try to justify the fear (or anxiety), the simple truth is that God's love has not been fully accepted – and embraced – over fear.

To compound the stronghold is the notion that the level or degree of fear is commensurate with my effort at being (or trying to be) a parent; as though, I am worried or fearful, I do not care. Of course, this notion is wrong and still another example or indicator of God's love not yet fully accepted or embraced...

If I pray and commit the children to God – his love and care – why should I be in fear? With him as my savior, who should I fear? I cannot live without fear, but pray that this fear will be applied as instructed and lead by God...and not by or toward man.

October 15, 2008

To: Prayer List (Billy Graham Evangelical Association)

From: Kirk Rainer
St. Johns Detention Center
St. Augustine, FL

Subject: "For-(e)-bearing Father", Part XI; "Being a Good Father", Religion Section, The St-Augustine Record, May 23rd, 2008

What is the difference between forebear and forbear? The first means a descendent or ancestor and the later means to refrain or control oneself under provocation. The two-fold meaning – or interjection of “e” to this title – draws on both the need or privilege to look to the family or roots for help in domestic duties; and, secondly, to *remain at peace with everyone as much as it is possible*.

Having heard or being aware of only a few of the past fathers of my family and, in that, a few stories; I cannot always or even frequently draw from their qualities or personalities. I remember a few experiences or observations of my maternal grandfather – his child-like antics as well as a collection of stories that may have been somewhat exaggerated like a yarn. Otherwise, I am limited to second-hand stories that tend to accentuate their qualities over other characteristics. Still, these experiences and stories are more than some has to draw from, and with this situation, should I turn to my ancestors for help? Yes, I think I should and know that I do on occasion.

As far as keeping the peace, these forebears likely had some moments that tested and even breached temperance; but can I still learn from them? Again, I should and can – both in their “moments” and in the enduring periods of relative peace and love that was possibly surrounded by a non-conductive setting. Was keeping the peace – or getting along with others – a priority for them; were they in situations like I have been – where loss and false accusations test and expose the heart and love of a father?

From my paternal grandfather came a strong work ethic and an ardent devotion to his family; from the other came the playful spirit to engage the grandkids on their level and to humorously carry the same into his own set of antics. This past (or life of my forebears) should not be forgotten but, in every way possible, held in reserve, and preserved for my own kids if possible. Though they will never know these men or have benefited from a consistent relationship with their grandfather, the benefit of knowing him (or them) through “a few experiences or observations” or “second-hand stories” cannot be fully assessed.

There is always the possibility or risk of remembrance through rose-colored glasses – as though these forebears were beyond the realness of their lives (or any life); yet, if I must choose between that and not knowing anything, I choose the stories however inflated or exaggerated. For these stories will be my stories; and again, in reserve and well preserved, will be the occasional source for knowing that I once knew of or heard of two or more men of which I share my lineage. Ironically, these forebears will bring some strength to forbear in my own struggles...and remain at peace...as much as it is possible.

October 10, 2008

To: Prayer List (Billy Graham Evangelical Association)

From: Kirk Rainer
6205 Cane Creek Drive
Anniston, AL 36206

Subject: "Future Father" - Part XII; A final letter on "Being a Good Father",
Religion Section, The St-Augustine Record, May 23rd, 2008

To begin, I have been released from jail and have not been found guilty of the charges. At the same time, my continuing estrangement from my children has been further enforced by the courts – and any opportunity for reconciliation seems inconceivable. Still, I cannot deny the power of prayer and must be grateful for you who have received some of my letters and have prayed as I ask. God bless you for your responses, for accepting my letters and request(s), and for effectually *visiting me while I was in prison* with your letters (from Matthew 25, *The Sheep and the Goats*).

The letters that I have written – twelve altogether – have supplied some therapy during my stay and most likely for some time. As I prepare this final letter, I am also typing the balance for posterity which may lead eventually to a book. Though writing is not a gift but a work-in-process, the ideal of a book is something that I have been encouraged to consider and to pursue as time and talent allow; and should I do so, the title may be *A Once and Always Father*...but a title is only the beginning.

Through the course of my experience as both a conventional and non-custodial parent has been a growing value for parenting – or for the caring of children – and, expressed another way, an appreciation for those who earnestly desire and attempt to be good parents and caretakers. I realize that none of us could achieve such pursuits on our childhood experiences alone, but must combine the past with what is learned in the process of successes...and failures. The parents (and others) whom I have observed may include some of you and in appreciation for your effort, I cannot say enough.

At the risk of lapsing into self-pity, I still have sorrow over the inability for reconciliation in the present and, for that matter, the divorce in the first place; and even in the marriage, the failures that I (and we) made in the presence or experience of our children. Having read of "Godly sorrow" as leading to repentance, perhaps this sorrow is well for the soul and, at the least, reconciliation between myself and my Lord. Still, I will continue to pray by faith in the same way that you too have matters of the church, your family and others that call for such a vigil.

A "Future Father" is not necessarily someone like myself (a non-custodial parent); but is one who plans, works and waits for the potential and even promise of the things of import, value or worth among his family. For me, these "things" do include my children however, whenever, or if ever reconciliation does occur; but all the while is the opportunity to grow better...not bitter.

From the classic movie *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, the salutation of the Cohen family:
"My father thanks you, my mother thanks, and I thank you."