**I HAVE ASKED TOO MUCH**

***Father Forgets***

When my sons Ryan and Jesse were respectively four and two years old I read an article by W. Livingston Larned that shook me to my core. As I read it I wept, loud and long. I felt that this man had searched my soul and exposed my greatest weakness as a father. I kept the article close by my desk to read it as my sons (and then later my daughter) were growing up under my guidance. It reminded me, powerfully, to remember, “*Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath*” (Eph. 6:4). It reminded me also to remember, “*Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged*” (Col. 3:21). I prayed over and over, “God, help me not to judge my children too critically, but instead mercifully, for that is how I wish to be judged by You.” Here is what Mr. Larned said to my heart. Maybe he will speak to yours as well.

“Listen son, I am saying this as you lie asleep, one little paw crumpled under your cheek and the blond curls stickily wet on your damp forehead. I have stolen into your room alone. Just a few minutes ago, as I sat reading my paper in the library, a stifling wave of remorse swept over me. Guiltily I came to your bedside.

“These are the things I was thinking, son. I had been cross to you. I scolded you as you were dressing for school because you gave your face merely a dab with a towel. I took you to task for not cleaning your shoes. I called out angrily when you threw some of your things on the floor. At breakfast I found fault too. You spilled things. You gulped down your food. You put your elbows on the table. You spread butter too thick on your bread. And as you started off to play and I made for my train you turned and waved a hand and called, “Goodbye daddy!” and I frowned and said in reply, “Hold your shoulders back!”

“Then it began all over again in the late afternoon. As I came up the road I spied you down on your knees playing marbles. There were holes in your socks. I humiliated you before your friends by marching you ahead of me to the house. Socks were expensive – and if you had to buy them you would be more careful!” Imagine that son, from a father!

“Do you remember later when I was reading in the library how you came in, timidly, with a sort of hurt look in your eyes? When I glanced up over my paper, impatient at the interruption, you hesitated at the door. ‘What is it you want?’ I snapped. You said nothing but ran across in one tempestuous plunge and threw your arms around my neck and kissed me, and your small arms tightened with an affection that God had set blooming in your heart and which even my neglect could not wither. And then you were gone, pattering up the stairs.

“And there was so much that was good and fine and true in your character. The little heart of you was as big as the dawn itself over the wide hills. This was shown by your spontaneous impulse to rush in and kiss me goodnight. Nothing else matters tonight son. I have come to your bedside in the darkness, and I have knelt there, ashamed!

“It is a feeble atonement. I know you would not understand these things if I told them to you during your waking hours. But tomorrow I will be a real daddy! I will chum with you, and suffer when you suffer, and laugh when you laugh. I will bite my tongue when impatient words come. I will keep saying as if it were a ritual: “HE IS NOTHING BUT A BOY – A LITTLE BOY!”

“I am afraid I have visualized you as a man. Yet as I see you now my son, crumpled and weary in your bed, I see that you are still a baby. Yesterday you were in your mother’s arms, your head on her shoulder.

“My son, I have asked too much. Too much.”

Rick’s note:

The greatest weakness I had as a father to my children was impatience. I too asked too much. Too much. I therefore begged my heavenly Father to please let me be more like Him, for He was always so very patient and longsuffering with me. I had to be such an exasperating child in His eyes, sinning over and over and over again. Yet, in His mercy and kindness He opened His loving arms, accepting this prodigal son home again and again and again.

My heavenly Father taught me how to be a better earthly father, with one major difference. He *never* failed me. To Him I say and pray, “Father, I love you, I worship and adore you, glorify Your name in all the earth.”

To my sons Ryan and Jesse, and to my daughter Meredith, I say, “Thank you for your childlike forgiveness when I faltered and failed you as a daddy. You all three became something noble and good in spite of my many failures. I am so very proud of you and honored to hear you call me “Dad.”

I love you. – Dad