

40 Days of Fitness

A daily devotional by Rev Garry Hardingham

DAY 14 – God’s Grace Brings us closer to the Father

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
John 14:6

It’s always sad to preside over a funeral of a person who is seemingly all alone in the world, only to find out they have a large family but are now completely estranged from them. Estrangement, for me, is the most cruellest of human conditions, because it does not have to be. Ignoring drugs and criminal behaviour, I believe there are basically **five reasons** why people become estranged from their parents. And I think we can all relate to at least one of them.

The first is when a parent **disrespects the child’s choice of spouse or partner**. Anyone who has adult children will know that it is difficult when the person they choose to spend their lives with is far from your expectations. Or, worse, your child chooses a destructive relationship. And often trying to talk to your child about it only results in huge conflict between them choosing you or that partner.

The second reason is the parent **refusing to apologise to the child**. Here is a classic example: “I confronted my mother.... She gas-lighted me, meaning she told me my perceptions were incorrect.... My mother sneered, ‘You have a very vivid imagination.’” I have a saying, ‘reality won’t hurt you, but perceptions can’. It doesn’t matter if perceptions are wrong, being able to apologise for real or perceived hurt in raising a child is very important.

The third reason is **overbearing or undermining grand-parenting**. It is so easy to watch your children raising their children and offer “advice”. Often you forget yourself what raising a child is like and how difficult it can be when in the midst of battle. Even pointing out that that ratbag three year old will eventually come good is not often as helpful as it seems.

The fourth reason is **playing favourites among the children**. This particular reason is multifaceted. It can cause jealousy amongst the siblings and it can end up with all the children, including the favourite, disowning the parent. And we have all had experience with the so-called “black sheep” of the family. I find it incredible that some parents forget that siblings talk amongst themselves in their absence. They usually see it clearly.

And finally, the fifth reason is **ignored boundaries**. And there are so many boundaries here to cross; financial, marital advice, criticising everything from the partner to clothes to careers to ‘taking control’ of the situation and so on and so on.

It is so easy to fall into these traps that lead to estrangement. After all, a parent invests decades of their lives and a fair bit of treasure in raising their children. There literally is ‘skin in the game’ here.

So, what is the common denominator here? Simply put, it’s a lack of grace; to actually be the adult in the room and recognise your behaviour and be the reconciler in the situation.

But our God’s Grace is always aimed at reconciling the relationship between God and ourselves. Peter recounts “*The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*” (2Peter 3:9) God’s deep desire is to restore broken relationships and, like the prodigal son, restore us back to the Father. He doesn’t punish us for being human, but suffers on our behalf, recognising our sinful nature and seeking forever to restore us unto Him. What a lesson for all of us with adult children.

PRAYER

Loving Father.
Teach me Your ways.
You are slow to anger and quick to forgive.
You reconcile us to you
Not for your sake, but for ours.
May the Grace you show to Your children
Be the grace we display to our children
That we may be all united in Your love and Peace. Amen