

The AALC Pastor's Conference Session Two – The Vocation of Fatherhood

In this session we are going to address the vocation of fatherhood. However, I need to take you on the scenic route to appreciate the importance of the vocation of fatherhood. Now, the majority of us are, by God's good and gracious will, fathers. Others here may not have children of their own blood but like the Apostle Paul, you have your spiritual children, like Paul had Timothy. So, enjoy the journey this hour and I pray you may learn something new or even affirm that which time and experience has already taught you.

It seems like stating the obvious but the church needs men but men need the church. Studies have presented persuasive evidence that drawing men to church also helps to shape their children's lives, thus providing the means for the church to continue into the following generations.

In 1996 Robert and Deborah Bruce published a book titled, *"Becoming Spiritual Soulmates with Your Child."* According to the Bruces, if both parents attend worship, the odds are very likely that their children will grow up as devout Christians. However, their evidence shows that fathers who practice the Christian faith, including worship, have the most significant and undisputed downstream impact on keeping their children engaged in the faith and in the church.

A Swiss government study published in November of 1999 affirms the work of Robert and Deborah Bruce and finds that in Switzerland, the primary means of Christian faith transmission to the next generation is through the father. This Swiss study found that the father is indisputably the primary influencer of the religious practices of his children. According to Swiss research:

- 1) If both parents attend worship regularly, 33 percent of their children will end up as regular worshippers, 41 percent will worship irregularly, and 25 percent of their children will not be active participants in the faith.
- 2) If the mother is faithful and regular in her participation in Christian worship, and yet the father is irregular in his practice, only three percent of the children will successively become regular worshippers themselves, 59 percent will most likely become irregular in their worship practices, and 38 percent will be not practicing the faith.
- 3) If the father is non-practicing and, at best, is a Christian in name only and the mother is a regular participant in worship, only two percent of their children will become regular worshippers, 37 percent most likely will practice irregular worship participation, and a staggering 60 percent or greater will not be engaged in the Christian faith.
- 4) Even if the mother is irregular or a non-practicing Christian and yet the father is a faithful and regular worshiper, 38 percent of their children went on to worship regularly, 44 percent worshiped irregularly and 18 percent did not worship as adults.

Thus, this study clearly indicates that if the father is loyal in the Christian faith, and routinely participates in worship, regardless of the mother's ways, 66 percent to 75 percent of their children will grow to worship as either regular or irregular worshippers. In short, the study finds that fathers set their children's course in the matters of the Christian faith.

Another complimentary study finds that boys and men need to worship and be engaged in the Christian faith to circumvent a potentially harmful impact upon life within the family. In a report

for the National Study of Youth, American sociologist Christian Smith with Phillip Kim, a Ph.D. graduate student in sociology at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, cites several positive affects upon families if husbands and fathers are engaged in the Christian faith, in comparison to fathers who are nonreligious:

- 1) Fathers engaged in their faith are perceived by their children to be quick to encourage their mothers in matters that are important to her.
- 2) Fathers engaged in worship are more likely to be seen by their children expressing love for their mother.
- 3) Fathers who are engaged in their faith are seen as men who will be fair and willing to compromise with the children's mother.
- 4) Religious fathers are perceived by their children to be less likely to blame their mother for their own problems.
- 5) According to the surveyed youth, worshipping fathers are significantly less likely to deride the children's mother.
- 6) Youth of fathers who are engaged in their faith seldom, if ever, see their fathers verbally abuse their mothers.

The information gained through Smith and Kim's research shows that participation in worship by men also has a measurably positive effect upon men, allowing them to be more engaged and supportive as husbands and fathers.

Scripture and the observation of life is clear of the role and vocation of fathers. But how did we get to where we are at; that fathers in the American society are missing or are seen as an addition child in the family as portrayed in so many movies and sit-coms? Time does not permit me to visit on the...evolving role of fathers but we are learned men and just as western culture has changed radically from an agrarian society to the information age so has the role of men in the family has changed. In regards to the church, regrettably the primary male influence upon children's catechesis was, out of necessity, has been assumed by the family's pastor. The research that I have presented, clearly shows it is still the father that has the greater impact upon his children's faith than anyone.

In order to understand the vocation of fatherhood, I need to take valuable time to discuss masculinity, as it is masculinity that is employed by God in the vocation of fatherhood and other related vocations.

First, maleness and masculinity are not the same. Maleness is about biology; it is about the form and function of a particular type of a living body. In the case of humans, with exceptions to biological anomalies, males are outwardly recognized by external reproductive organs and the development of a high ratio of muscle mass to body fat. At a genetic level, the biological trigger for male development is in the Y chromosome's cellular existence, which contains the gene SRY. The male gender or masculinity is much more than possessing a male body and a Y chromosome. It is the complex assemblage of identity, behavior, mental qualities, and personality characteristics, including cultural and spiritual influences, in other words, the unique blend of mind, body, and soul. Therefore, masculinity is understood in comparison and juxtaposition to femininity. Masculinity is characterized by separation, inversely to femininity, which is characterized by communion.

While developing her own identity, a young female can readily use her mother as a proper template for her femininity. As a non-negotiable part of her femininity, she will bleed and through the hazards of childbirth, she will face pain and even the risk of death. However, the young male must separate from his mother and seek his identity apart from her. He must find his masculine identity by identifying with mature males, ideally, first with his loving father. If this does not occur, he will never become masculine. Generally speaking, a father's loving involvement in his son's life will offer a far less destructive path to masculinity than accidental male relationships, which, in their extreme, are tragically depicted in youth gangs. A significant and pivotal key role of the father is to demonstrate and model for his son the wholesome attributes of compassion, love, and respect for the boy's mother as essential elements of masculinity and he will apply these learned behaviors towards his wife.

The developmental path of masculinity also requires that the young man must give up being mothered before becoming a husband and a father. The young male must resist and even reject that which would keep him from true masculinity, including the infantile and feminine. He is not destined for a lifetime of isolation, but instead, he must have a reunion with the feminine, ideally under the sanctity of marriage as defined by God. He must maintain a respectable distance from the ways of women but yet rise to defend and be prepared to lay down his life to protect his wife, family, and community. Men must choose to take significant risks, engage in conflict, expect suffering and endure hardships so that women can conceive and bear their children. In short, masculinity is not a destination nor is it ever fully realized, but rather it is always developing; that is, it is a trajectory that never finds its termination.

Unlike femininity, masculinity requires initiation to make a "sharp break" from the feminine, an initiation that causes the young man to separate from the feminine and motherhood, followed immediately by a period of transition to begin his new identity as a man. This rite of initiation allows the young man to die to his life as a child of women and to be reborn as a man of men. For many, the entrance into the military has served this function.

Masculinity is hazardous and mysterious. It can only be achieved by denying the temptation to return to the interdependence of mother and child, and, most significantly, it can only be acknowledged and confirmed outside the man by other men. Perhaps the question that should be raised at this time, will the church continue to let others define masculinity for her men and boys or will she point to Christ Jesus as the perfect form of masculinity for all males? Through her Christ, she has the field and she has a name for it...vocation.

One of the most influential Lutheran theologians of the twentieth century, Gustaf Wingren, in his work "*Luther on Vocation*", remarked concerning Luther's theology of vocation, that first and foremost, vocation is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, through which one is called to be a son of God. Through Christian freedom, "*faith and relation to God attain real significance for vocation, and vocation is shaped solely according to the need of others.*"

In other words, vocation is only in reference to the work of a son of God as he loves his neighbor. According to Wingren, Luther's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:20, which reads, "*Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called,*" is the baseline scriptural

foundation for the doctrine of vocation for the son of God. That is, every vocation has its setting in a particular place and deals with specific people in a definite time. Former professor of Theology at Concordia, Chicago Dr. Steven Hein posits that vocation addresses specific questions as the son of God lives out his life of faith in love, service, and sacrifice to his neighbor. Hein proposes these questions: 1)What is his duty to the community of family, to the community of saints and of the greater community? 2) Whom must he have confidence in to serve? 3) Who is his neighbor that he must serve? 4) What are those specific tasks and responsibilities he is obligated to fulfill?

God created male and female to exist in the network of relationships that Luther called the “three estates”, namely ecclesiastical (church), civil (public), and familial (marriage, family, and home). God instituted the three estates and sanctified them by His Word, for the good of His creation, to curb sin and to permit His people to live in peace and concord (1Tim 2:2). God works within these three estates through human means. The sons of God love and serve God and neighbor in their vocations within these three estates. By outward appearance, these estates may appear quite ordinary and mundane , inasmuch as they do not require being cloistered off from the rest of humanity in monastic fortresses to be seen as God-pleasing acts.

According to Luther, What then does Christian faith say to this? It opens its eyes, looks upon all these insignificant, distasteful, and despised duties in the Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels. It says, O God, because I am certain that thou hast created me as a man and hast from my body begotten this child, I also know for a certainty that it meets with thy perfect pleasure. I confess to thee that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers, or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am serving thy creature and thy most precious will? O how gladly will I do so, though the duties should be even more insignificant and despised. Neither frost nor heat, neither drudgery nor labor, will distress or dissuade me, for I am certain that it is thus pleasing in thy sight... God, with all his angels and creatures is smiling—not because the father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith.

Indeed, Luther advises that these estates are sufficient to live out the Christian life in Jesus Christ, These are the three hierarchies ordained by God, and we need no more; indeed, we have enough and more than enough to do in living aright and resisting the devil in these three.

Because these estates are the battlefronts in which the devil seeks to divide, these seemingly ordinary stations become the locus of “extraordinary duties of a higher calling” for the sons of God. In other words, these vocational estates of church, civil society and family are the fields of spiritual warfare in which the sons of God must fight.

The devil’s chief tactic is to cause division within the three estates by dividing the sons of God from each other, by dividing the sons of God from God’s eternal Word, and by dividing the sons of God from God. Ministry, family, and American life afford many opportunities for the father of all lies to fragment lives, relationships and faith. It is a target-rich environment for the enemy. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in His high priestly prayer, would have us be in this world and not of it (John 17:15 – 16). He would have His followers live on the battlefield, in their various

stations in life, to let their “light shine” so that others would witness their acts of mercy, kindness, responsibility, bravery, courage, and love, thus glorifying the source of these virtues, God the Father (Matt 5:16).

To get the vocation of fatherhood, I need to pass through three other important vocations that serve as foundational for the vocation of fatherhood. First, the vocation of boyhood.

The development of the male child is complex, and while the goal is masculinity, it is not a destination that comes with an estimated time of arrival. Luther and theologians of vocation agree that to be a child is a vocation in and of itself, with Luther even calling the relationship between child and parents vocational. Jesus Christ sanctified and blessed childhood with his own childhood as he was “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,” (LC II 31) born under the Law (Gal 4:4), and lived a child’s life, submitting to his earthly parents to the glory of His heavenly Father (Luke 2:41). The vocation of a child is to receive. He receives his parents as he does not choose them. He receives food, shelter, clothes, and all that is needed to support his physical body and life from his parents as God the Father provides (SC II 2). The same is true with God the Father. God chooses him and brings him spiritually into His kingdom through the waters of Holy Baptism. As he receives the grace of God through Christ Jesus, this baptized child receives a new identity, which is reserved only for the baptized, namely, a son of God (Gal 4:5-7).

The vocation of boyhood is to discover God’s creation, learn to serve in the family, and to be catechized in the living Word. This vocation is not static but matures, and while he continues to receive, his immediate relationships expand his vocation. One endeavor within the boy’s vocation, that his father may not appreciate but God in His fatherly wisdom permits, is that the son will bring to ruin his father’s idols. By virtue of being a normal and active child, the son will scratch the new car, break an expensive window, lose a precious tool, drop the costly laptop, or cause the father to place his career second to his son’s needs. The boy needs to be taught that to honor his parents is his most noble and heroic act, a more excellent work than the most pious acts of cloistered monks in their fortresses.

Recognizing the gifts of parents is a God-pleasing thing. As the boy is taught to obey his parents, he also learns the discipline of self-sacrifice for, first and foremost, his parents and siblings, and then for his neighbors. In the ideal situation, the boy begins to identify with his father and observes the masculine vocations of manhood and fatherhood. This includes how his father loves his mother as her husband and how his father’s connectedness and servitude toward others is enacted in this physical world. Thus, he is implicitly taught, by observing his father acting Christlike, just how to nurture and minister to his future wife and family, should it be God’s will.

The second building block for the vocation of fatherhood is the vocation of manhood

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways” (1 Cor 13:11).

The young man has worlds to conquer, problems to solve and treasures to discover. But more than anything, he longs to be recognized as a man, something that cannot be done by women, as

only other men can do it. This needs for establishing and proving masculinity starts early in a young man's life. If he has not learned the basics of masculinity from his father, he must resort to other methods, which include the painful repressing of his identification with his mother and all things feminine.

This period between boyhood and manhood includes the young man's need to learn to be of service to his neighbor. That is, he must learn to use this period to serve beyond his family by going out into the immediate community or even out into the greater world through church sponsored youth missions. While he is free to seek out education to better prepare him for vocations within the three estates, he must not see himself exempted from seeking out opportunities to love his neighbor. It is for this reason that young men should be constantly reminded that in their vocation as students they are also called to a "life of the mind to be of service." The young man, upon the realization that he has attained salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, becomes aware that he has but one purpose in life: which is to, out of gratitude, live a life in faith by loving and serving his neighbors in Jesus Christ to the glory of God.

The young man yearns for validation of his masculinity by older males, father, grandfathers, and men of the church. For this reason, the vocation of the young male must include fellowship with other males, especially experienced Christian males. These men can offer both spiritual and worldly wisdom garnered from their own struggles and experiences in life. Such Christian men are more than willing to pass on their skills and wisdom to benefit the younger man's growth. St. Paul elevates the vocation of the unmarried man (1 Cor 7:7-8). He commissions single men to be "anxious about the things of the Lord" (1 Cor 7:32) and that existence as an unmarried man is not a shameful or lesser vocation. Despite this scriptural support, the rarest species seen in church worship is the single male. Even the focused targeting of men by Promise Keepers overlooked and left behind the unmarried men. Is it that the church does not know what to do with them?

Single men must be challenged and provided opportunities to grow in faith during this precarious season in their lives, for the fact remains that single men are leaving the church without looking back. While this vocation of the unmarried male is stereotypically assigned to young males, there is also a host of more mature bachelors. Many are unmarried through the travesty of divorce or the heartbreak of the death of a wife. Like others, the unmarried male has been endowed with various gifts from God to share with his neighbors and needs to hear the sweet good news of the Gospel. While the church dares not treat these men as children, neither should it abandon them to fight the battles of faith and life alone. Rather, the church must persistently and lovingly point these men to Jesus Christ, while continually reminding them that they are not lesser men for lack of wife, but are in fact, valued and loved sons of God.

The third building block to the vocation of fatherhood is the vocation of the husband.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and

cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband (Eph 5:25-33).

While all the vocations of manhood call men to be "little Christs" to their neighbors, it is in the vocation of husband that men have been specifically and clearly tasked with this vital responsibility (Eph. 5:25-32). Despite modern views of sexual equality, the Scriptures clearly teach that the husband has headship over his wife, but they also teach that this headship becomes a vocation laden with a heavy burden of self-sacrifice.

Jesus teaches through His words and actions that authority is not just the manifestation of power or bending the will of others, but rather authority is to be exercised in love and service, finding its apex as expressed in sacrifice. To be Christ-like and to live out his vocation as a husband, the man is required to empty himself and, by taking on the form of a servant to his wife (Phil 2:7), he must be quick to forgive and quicker to seek forgiveness all the while flourishing with his wife in the grace of Jesus Christ. The husband is also charged to be mindful of and to attend to his wife's spiritual battles, meaning he must be vigilant to minister to her by encouraging her to direct her eyes to her Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Specifically, he is tasked to encourage her to participate in the Divine Service, ensuring that she is sustained through Jesus Christ's sacraments, and as husband he must both pray with her and for her.

Clearly the vocation of husband includes headship; but it must be noted that a survey of Scripture unambiguously reveals headship is not some form of superiority or lordship over his wife but rather is a sacred duty (Gen 3:16b; Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1). Just as the head must be joined to the body for life, so the husband and wife need to live, work, worship, rest, and abide together. This is a must for them to be in complete union. As Jesus Christ lives out His headship to redeem and defend His church, the husband is called to both spiritually and physically protect his wife and marriage. Without patronizing her, he is to build up his wife. He is to love and defend his wife just as he loves and defends himself. This imperative includes the way he acts towards her and how he speaks with sensitivity and affection about her whilst outside the sanctity of their home.

Also impacting the vocation of husband is the delaying of marriage. In the first half of the 1970s, in the ages between twenty and forty-five, nearly 75 percent of the American population of this age group were married. Two decades into the twenty-first century, the number married in this same age group has decreased below 50 percent. Cohabitation is accepted as the norm and not the exception, thus bringing other undesirable consequences. Indeed, the era of expressive individualism has taken a severe toll on the young man, his faith and his potential vocation as husband.

Finally, despite being ordained by God, many Christian marriages sadly end in divorce. While most Christian churches in the U.S. have less than the national percentage of divorced people (13 percent), divorce, justified for any reason, is still an issue within the church. Additionally, all denominations of Christianity in the country have adherents who admit to cohabitation, including

the typically identified conservative and fundamental denominations. Statistics show that even in confessional and orthodox Lutheran churches, the need to minister to men concerning these issues is obvious. This decline in Christian participation in the vocation of husband is a clear threat to living out one's life as a son of God. This session will not cover this in detail, but clearly, the church needs to be intentional in ministering to all concerning the difficult topics of divorce and cohabitation.

Finally, the Vocation of Fatherhood

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4).

Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool—though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith—my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling—not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil's fools. ~ Martin Luther

A man who has a child immediately finds that his identity has been changed; he is now called a father, a new vocation which is rooted in the Holy Trinity and the First Article of the Apostles' Creed. By the fatherhood of God, earthly fathers bear the name of the first person of the Trinity. The vocation of father is an office that takes its form and function, responsibilities and obligations from God the Father, who is the Creator and Father of all. Ideally, the vocation of husband prepares a man for the vocation of fatherhood. After entering into a covenantal relationship with his wife, that is after sacred vows, they become one flesh in accordance with Scripture. His vocation as the husband is to provide physical, emotional, and spiritual security. His role as the head is now extended in a similar and yet very different relationship with his child. While he is not of one flesh with his child, nevertheless, the child is of his flesh. Not only is he charged by virtue of his office as a husband to make sacrifices, now that sacrificial responsibility is extended into his new vocation of fatherhood due to the conception and arrival of his firstborn.

As life begins at conception (Psalm 139) and all children are conceived in sin (Ps 51:5), the vocation of fatherhood also includes the responsibility of being the disciplinarian, the one who uses the Law to point out sin in order to curb sinful behavior, just as God the Father disciplines His own in love (Heb 12:4-11). Fathers are addressed explicitly in St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, exhorting them to properly discipline their children, but doing so with restraint as not to embitter them. Just as God the Father works through His Law and Gospel, earthly fathers are reminded that the Gospel of grace and the doctrine of justification are part and parcel of how they must exercise both their vocation of fatherhood, and the manner in which they discipline their children.

While God places an enormous responsibility on fathers, in reality the duties are straightforward and ordinary. If a father desires that his children be happy, prosperous, and Christian adults,

Lutheran theologian Gene Vieth and his daughter, Deaconess Mary Moerbe, recommend the following: 1. Be married to their mother. 2. Do not divorce her. 3. Do not abandon your children (including placing career before them). 4. Be involved in your children's lives. 5. Take them to church!

The first pious act of fatherhood is to, as quickly as possible, bring the child and mother to the baptismal font, to initiate the child as a son of God. The father's follow-on duties include the proper instruction of the child in the faith while exercising fatherly headship by example. This pressing need is substantiated in the earlier evidence, which finds the critical importance of the fathers' worship practice upon their children.

We pastors, by our office are called to guide and teach fathers that their children, both sons and daughters, have entered into a supernatural battle with the father of all lies. Having been marked by the cross, the children have been publicly declared the sworn enemy of the devil. These new sons of God now shine (1 Thes 5:5) before the darkened dead eyes of the demonic hosts, who immediately begin to scheme, striving, even before the baptismal party returns to their seats after the Sacrament of Baptism, to tear the new son of God away from Jesus Christ.

Just as the husband is concerned about his wife's spiritual battles, so the father must be concerned about the spiritual warfare of his child. No true father would willfully throw his child into a raging torrent, yelling, "You gotta figure out how to swim for yourself!" Why then would a Christian father not defend and not be an intimate part of the spiritual training of his child, preparing the child for battle against the evil one, the devil who desires nothing less than his child's eternal damnation? The only sure defense is for the father to put the Word of God in his child's hand, bring him to worship, and do his utmost to provide a good example of godly masculinity whilst living in the grace of God.

I need to conclude but not without identifying one more masculine vocation that we men, Lord willing, may enjoy. I call it the vocation of wiseman. I submit the following as foundational to this valuable vocation. "Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their fathers" (Prov 17:6). "Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness" (Titus 2:2). "O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come." (Ps 71:17-18).

One of the primary responsibilities associated with the vocation of wiseman is that younger males need older mature men. The mature man's vocation includes extending the invitation to boys to become men, calling and grooming immature youth to maturity, and welcoming young men into the brotherhood. The wiseman will always be a son of God and while he draws breath in this temporal world, he continues to be in a spiritual battle. But whereas the temporal warrior relies heavily upon his youthful strength and speed, both of which retire in midlife, the son of God's true and steadfast strength comes not from himself, but relies on a faith that is strengthened and sustained by the Word of God (Ps 144) and by the means of grace; hence, chronological age is no liability.

The wiseman appreciates that he is part of a continuum, a line of sons of God, stretching back in time to Adam and his faithful sons, to the patriarchs of the Old Testament, to the apostles and the early converts who had their whole families baptized into the resurrected Jesus Christ (Acts 16:25-40). In his final decades of temporal existence, the mature male is continually sustained by God's eternal Word and His means of grace. Remembering that there are those whose shoulders he stands on, it is now his turn to be used by God to build up the holy faith of others, through God's Word and Godly wisdom (Heb 12:1-2).

As evident through St. Paul's encouragement to Timothy regarding the contempt Timothy received because of his youthfulness (1 Tim 4:12), male elders are regrettably entirely capable of dismissing the "beautiful feet" (Rom 10:14-15) of a younger son of God who is faithfully proclaiming the Gospel. The vocation of wiseman includes acknowledging the spiritual gifts of the younger generation, including those of a pastor who is young enough to be the elder's child. Wisemen are to celebrate in their vocation by modeling, for their grandchildren of blood and Spirit, the Godly life. By actually studying Scripture and relying upon prayer, the wiseman's actions demonstrate for all to see a faith that looks past this temporal life and relies fully on the promises of Jesus Christ (Matt 6:25-27, 31-34).

Perhaps the pinnacle of the vocation of wiseman is to die in the true faith without fear. The approaching temporal death of a son of God is not to be feared as his Lord has conquered death and the grave (1 Cor 15:55-57). Yet even the deathbed becomes a significant field of spiritual warfare for the sons of God. After a lifetime of spiritual warfare, wisemen know that the devil's last-ditch tactic is to convict the son of God with the Law. But the sons of God also know that they have three God-given weapons to defeat the devil's attacks: 1) Blood - The redeeming and cleansing blood of Jesus Christ washed in his baptism (Col 2:12-15). 2) Faith - The faith created and sustained by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His most holy meal (Heb 12:2). 3) Promise - The promise of God expressed through the Scriptures such as "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*" (Ps 23:4: and "*They loved not their lives even unto death*" (Rev 12:11).

Luther applied the core doctrine of the Reformation, the doctrine of justification, to the human process of dying. For Luther, a "good death" expressed by faith in Jesus Christ and trust in His Gospel, came to replace the deathbed rituals of Rome as the concrete hope of eternal life.

While it is undoubtedly counter-cultural, the son of God is to keep his death ever before him. In fact, the wiseman, as a matured son of God, can in faith live a life without fear of death. When the wiseman avails himself of the Divine Service, with the means of grace and the proclaimed Gospel, this elder son of God knows by faith that he is right before God, and that this is solely through the perfect works and merits of Jesus Christ. This confidence is contagious and is meant to be shared; that is, the aged son of God can use the prospect of imminent death as an opportunity to proclaim the lifesaving Gospel of Jesus Christ to others, especially to his loved ones. Since this confidence is all the work of the Holy Spirit, the aged son of God, as he approaches death need not be worried about possessing the ability or the cognitive means to proclaim these things even as he turns toward the "valley of the shadow of death." His holy faith informs him that his Master is there walking with him and sustaining him as he enters the Church Triumphant. (Psalm 23).

The sainted Swedish Lutheran Bishop Bo Giertz (d. 1998) depicts this comfort that only the faith in Jesus Christ offers as temporal death approaches the son of God in his book, *The Knights of Rhodes*: “*Ibrahim?*” [said the Knight to his Muslim servant.] “*What are you thinking about?*” “*Paradise, my lord...and God....He is one... He is exalted, higher than the heavens, incomprehensible, glorious beyond all understanding, impossible to grasp.... If we could understand him, he would no longer be God. And if he could become like us, he would not be God either. We would never dare to say that the Infinitely Exalted would have a son with a woman, that the Glory and the Divinity, the holy, inexpressible whom we cannot find words for...that this one should be found in a miserable, sweaty, human body, which can get sores and colic, which must stuff itself with porridge and must relieve itself as we do. This is blasphemy. Therefore, [Allah] gives us victory....*”

[Injured, on his deathbed, and far from home, the Knight] closed his eyes and...folded his hands. A great calm came over him. He knew he was not alone. He knew this without needing to clothe it with words. There was someone here who walked amid the hospital beds, just like in the streets of Capernaum. This one stopped and bowed down. His breast, too, had a large wound. His hands bled. One could tell that he knew everything that those at home would never understand. He, too, had experienced it: cold and rain, filth and vermin, beatings and wounds, fear of death and defeat. The God who had come down into all this, He was very near. It was good to have such a God.