

Fowey Fables – No.23

January 2010

Nick and I recently held a Fathers and Sons weekend at Taihoa, his exciting new centre at Opotiki. When I was thinking about which fathers and sons we might have invited, it occurred to me that one of the most interesting father/son combinations in the Bible to have had at such a weekend would have been David and Solomon. Their contribution to a study discussion would have been absolutely fascinating. The spiritual depth of David's insight into what a relationship with God is all about, and Solomon's genius for wise nuggets of life advice would have been utterly extraordinary.

The difficult moments might have come when we asked them each about the relationship between them. Imagine Solomon asking the kind of questions young men ask their Dads. "How did you and Mum meet, Dad? Is it right that Mum had been married before she met you?(II Sam.11) Why do I have so many stepmothers?(II Sam.3) You didn't make any mistakes when you were my age, did you? How should I choose a wife?"(I Sam.18) This would have been David's opportunity to teach his son of the limitless forgiveness of God which meant that the whole sad story did not need to be told or even remembered.(Ps.51 and 32)

I then got to thinking how it might be a generation later for Solomon to bring one of his sons, Rehoboam, to another Fathers and Sons weekend. Rehoboam might have asked his Dad some of the same questions. Sadly I suspect that, unlike David, Solomon for all his high biblical IQ would have had no answers. Yet Solomon had written almost a whole book of good advice for his son.(Prov.1-29) Apparently Rehoboam never heeded any of it and certainly had nothing to pass to his own son.(I Kings 12) What went wrong?

Undoubtedly David introduced Solomon to his God so clearly that when Solomon came to assume responsibility for leadership he knew how to turn to God for help.(I Kings 3:5-9) David had left his son a strong kingdom, a clear vision and substantial resources but by far the greatest treasure he had to bequeath to Solomon was his song book, the Psalms. As king, Solomon would look back on that book and draw much from it. At the same time he would also remember, all too vividly, the terrible contradiction between his father's teaching and David's disastrous home life. His would be the struggle of so many children of Christian preachers. What do I listen to, his message or his example? Solomon extended his father's vision and work greatly by acting on his teaching. But when it came to marriage he copied his father's mistakes nearly 100 times over.(I Kings 11:3) Bathsheba was not David's second wife but his eighth, and then there were some girlfriends on the side.(II Sam.15:16) For poor young Rehoboam, godly wisdom drowned in the moral chaos of home where Solomon housed not only endless women but also their gods.

In the light of such Old Testament stories it is no surprise that when Paul talked of the necessary qualifications of spiritual leaders he always said simply 'Your message must work at home'.(I Tim.3:1-5; Tit.1:6) He did not mean that Bible teachers had to be model husbands or perfect fathers. He knew that as sinners they would not be, and like

David, there would always be forgiveness available. He urged them however to long to be living examples of the truth they taught. His desire was that the witness of their words would shout louder than the errors of their private lives.

It seems likely that an even bigger regret Solomon or Rehoboam might have had about their dads was not their mistakes, damaging though they were, but the lack of personal time together because they were so preoccupied with the mess they had created. This is the greatest complaint of modern teenagers.

One of the special bonuses God gives us at Fowey Lodge is the opportunity at times to meet the next generation, or even the one after, from past students. Recently a delightful young lady turned up whose father, John Watton, had been a student in 1981. John and his wife Laurie have been missionaries in Ghana for some years and have seen God work particularly among Muslim people. Joe Pinemau from the rural north of New Zealand was a student in the mid 70s. His grand-daughter moved into the Lodge recently and told me that Joe had been a wonderful inspiration to Maori people in remote areas for many years until his death about 10 years ago.

Currently we are in the middle of Water Weeks led by Nick and Pete and based these days at Opotiki. Taihoa is the ideal site we always dreamed of for young people to have fun and meet Jesus at the same time. The combination of the river, the sea, the farm and the bush, and a beautiful old log cabin is already being used by God. As we get to know the kids and hear their stories of inspiring Christian parents and sometimes of private heartache, our longing is to be able to teach them how one day they can have marriages and families where the Truth works.

Pete is about to launch into the training and career of his dreams. After a year of testing various possibilities from all of which he has learned much, he has been accepted to begin an Outdoor Education Instructor's diploma at OPC at Mt Ruapehu next month.

For Christine and me it has been another fulfilling year of Bible School on the one hand and medical practice on the other. Because both are based at the Lodge, the one hand and the other are often interestingly entwined together. Students have medical needs and patients need the medicine of Jesus. In both aspects of our life the greatest challenge continues to be helping hurting families to know Him.

One of the most moving aspects of the many years of Bible school has been the humbling faithfulness of the lecturers who have served beside us for so long. Two of them have just left us for the next year. Haldane Rowan has gone back to Australia to direct Wongabri, the Capernwray centre. Peter Williams leaves this week for Chennai in India where he and his wife Tammy will work with the International Justice Mission, a group of Christian lawyers dedicated to bringing justice to oppressed people. We will greatly miss them both. Their places will be taken by Eugene de Villiers from South Africa, and Don Rhody from the USA both of whom are outstanding Bible teachers. Ruth Harris, a past student from 1975, has filled in beautifully this last term while Dick Park has had a

break. Ruth is returning to Canada shortly after making a lovely teaching contribution to our programme for students and also the Lodge children.

Paul Crowhurst has been Principal of the Bible School for the last two years while Chris and I have concentrated on directing. Paul has come up with a great idea which will allow us to introduce the ministry of the Bible school to a wider audience. On Saturday, 6th February we are holding a one day Bible conference in which nearly all the lecturers will contribute a taste of their teaching around the theme 'Jesus: the sum of all things'. We will individually take one of the 'I am's' of John Gospel. Fliers are available to pass on to anyone you can interest. Cost – nothing, but bring some lunch to share, like the little boy who offered his lunch at the feeding of the 5000.

We are hoping that John Wandera from Uganda will be able to visit us again this year and share more news of what is being done for the survivors of shattered families, the orphans, the widows, and those trying to care for them, the pastors and the projects in which many of us continue to be involved. More news when we know when.

We have just begun a new decade. Many think the last one was a disaster for much of the world. Jesus Christ still waits to change this world – one family at a time. Thank you for continuing to join with us in Him to make a difference. Do share your news with us.

Our love in Christ

Tony, Chris, Nick and Pete