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As I have told you before, David, the second king of Israel, was once a shepherd. And he understood the nature of sheep as well as the responsibility of a shepherd. With that intimate knowledge, David wrote that famous Psalms 23, depicting sheep as human being and the shepherd as the Lord.

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. ⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalms 23:1-6)

We have learned that the Lord is our shepherd, that he leads us to the green pasture and beside quiet waters, and that the Lord will be with us even when we walk though the darkest valley.

But the work of a shepherd is not limited to these. A shepherd holds a "rod" and a "staff" in his hands. It is written: **"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me"** (Psalms 23:4) "Rod" and "staff" are mentioned often in the Bible. From the Bible, we understand that the rod and the staff had different purposes. Mainly, a "rod" was used as a weapon to protect the sheep from enemy, while a "staff" was used to guide the sheep to the right path and to correct the behavior of the sheep. The "staff" was a visible sign to follow the shepherd leading the flock, and also represented the authority of the shepherd. From today's scripture reading, I would like to talk about two topics. The first one is a "necessary authority".

Necessary authority

A "staff" reminds us of the staff of Moses. That staff was given to Moses as the symbol of authority that God had granted Moses in order to save the Israelites out of the slavery of Egypt. With this staff Moses battled with the magicians of Egypt, parted the Red Sea so that the people could walk to the other side, and struck the rock to allow water to gush out from it. The staff was with Moses always, and people were reminded of the authority God had granted to Moses.

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Authority is not self-declared. Rather, it is granted. Moses was granted an authority from God to lead the people of Israel and he executed it. The reason why the police officers can stop our cars is because they are granted an authority to do so.

Mark Chapter 2 Verses 1-12 talk about a time when Jesus Christ was at a house in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. Many people were gathered there. The house was jam-packed with people. Then, four people came carrying a paralyzed man. Seeing that they could not approach Jesus because of the crowd, they decided to climb up the roof, made an opening there, and lowered the man through the hole. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man: "Son, your sins are forgiven." But some of the teachers of the law were thinking: "Why does this fellow talk like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Knowing what they were thinking in their hearts, he says: **"I want you to know that I have an authority on earth to forgive sins."** People do not have any authority to forgive sins. In our world, we have a court of law, and people are forgiven or commuted their sentence there. But, actually, we are all sinners in front of God. And, we have no authority to forgive other sinners. But, Jesus was granted that authority.

Jesus talked about his authority more clearly when he was leaving this earth. ¹⁸ **Then Jesus came to them and said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** (Matthew 28:18-20)

Yes. Jesus had been granted all of the authority from his father. With that authority, Jesus is talking to us. We are supposed to obey his authority.

But people tend to resist the authority and the people in authority. People, especially young people, tend to rebel all forms of authority. To young people, authority is old fashioned and outdated. Even grown-ups have some feeling of resentment for people in power and authority. A dictator abusing authority is even harmful to the general public. Important thing is that the authority is given to the right people. What is the basis of the power, and how is the power exercised? We need an authority that we can trust and obey.

In these USA, news media are busy reporting the progress of the presidential election. his election is important since it decides who would be given the authority to lead us all. President will be given an authority over this nation and the people within it.

When the right power is lost, there is bound to be a chaos and destruction. If a parent loses its authority, he cannot raise the children. Police without proper authority will lead to unruly society. (This nation is struggling on the right way to exercise its authority. An

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authority comes with power. But if such power is misused, such authority will lead to chaos.)

Our world today seems to have lost the basic principle. We do not know what is good and what is bad. We do not have the right guideline to follow. What is a right form of marriage? What does education have to teach the young? How should we raise our children? We even waver on the clear reason for not killing people. We need a solid guideline from the correct authority. The one who can provide us with such an authority is Jesus Christ.

Our shepherd Jesus Christ carries a staff of authority in the form of a cross. This authority is not forced on us against our will. This cross provides us with strong motivation to follow the authority. This authority will lead us to the right path.

Paul said: **"Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air."** (I Corinthians 9:26) Many of us are like a boxer beating the air. We swing our arms aimlessly and end up finding nothing but disappointment. If we were to live under the authority of Jesus, who had been granted all of the authority from God, we would be shown our goals clearly and we should understand our role in this world. Let me talk about the second point. That is the different forms of love.

Different forms of love

Our Lord and our shepherd carries a staff of authority and he also carries a rod. Lord Jesus sometimes corrects us with his rod. It does not mean that he will beat us physically to discipline us. He uses his rod to open our eyes to our mistakes and to bring us back to the right path. It is very important for us to open our eyes and realize what we are doing. The Bible also tells us so.

Solomon wrote: **"A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother."** (Proverbs 29:15) The writer of the letter to the Hebrews said: ⁵ **And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They**

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disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:5-11)

I read many books during my sabbatical leave. One was a book entitled "Journey to fatherhood: Learning from mistakes recorded in the Bible on raising a child", written by Rev. Nobuyuki Toyoda. Rev. Toyoda had lost his father when he was still young. That is why he did not have father figure to learn from. In his book "Journey to fatherhood" he tried to share his understanding of what it means to be a father.

Rev. Toyoda quotes from Erich Fromm, a Jewish psychologist and a philosopher, about love of mother. "Being loved by mother is a passive experience. One does not have to do anything to be loved by mother. Her love is unconditional. Only requirement is to be alive and be her child. Love of mother provides an extreme happiness and peace of mind. You do not have to seek it or be qualified to receive that love."

The Chinese character for a mother contains a character for an ocean. The love of mother is vast and deep as an ocean. Her love embraces us regardless of what we do, or who we are. She loves the child simply because the child is hers.

Regarding the love of a father, he also quoted from Erich Fromm and wrote: "Fatherly love is conditional. Father loves the child only if the child meets his expectation, carries out his duty, and looks a lot like him."

These words opened my eyes. A leading psychologist of Japan, Dr. Hayao Kawai points out that "Most of Japanese people do not understand what the father is." I tend to agree. When we are asked what the father is, most of us are not sure how to answer. But Erich Fromm said that "fatherly love is conditional", I realized that the father figures in the Bible are just like that.

For almost 20 years recently, Christian churches have been saying that people are loved as they are. This is not incorrect. True, God's love is unconditional. These are words we Japanese can understand. They are pleasing words. Endo Shusaku, a Christian writer found it hard to convey the concept of Father God to Japan. So, he conveyed a Mother God, namely God that embraces everyone like a mother. He presented God of motherly love that loves people as they are. But, that is not the only image of God in the Bible. There is also fatherly God and fatherly love.

So, what did Fromm mean when he said that the fatherly love is conditional? Perhaps some of you have never heard about this. But, it is mentioned often throughout the Bible. For instance, what this God say when he called Abraham? ¹ **The LORD had said to**

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Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:1-2)

The story of God and the people of Israel had started when God spoke to Abraham. At that time, God commanded Abraham: "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you." This was a command from the one with the authority. And, God promised that if Abraham obeyed that command, "[God] will make [Abraham] into a great nation, and will bless [him] and will make [his] name great, and he will be a blessing."

This command was not the only one from God. Later, Abraham was blessed with his son Isaac. But, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice the life of Isaac to God. But, when Abraham was about to kill Isaac with his knife, an angel called out to Abraham: **"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."** (Genesis 22:12) Here we see God commanding Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice and Abraham obeying his command. This action of Abraham was a testimonial of his faith. God was happy to see that Abraham obeyed God's command and God was satisfied.

Rev. Toyoda wrote: "If a father does not expect nor demand anything from his child, the child cannot receive love from the father. A father who does not demand obedience from a child may be innocuous. But, such a father is not accepting the child into his love."

Love of God is complete. That love embraces both fatherly and motherly love and more. God's love is unconditional, and yet God demands we respond to his expectation. That is why Jesus told us: **"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."** (Matthew 5:48)

Rev. Toyoda also speaks about the relationship between David and his son Absalom. David had 20 children. David especially loved his first son Amnon. (Bible often talks about one child being loved more than other children.) King David must have wanted this Amnon to take over his position eventually. But a problem intervened.

But, this Amnon falls in love with his half-sister Tamar. It was a forbidden love. But, his strong desire caused him to overpower and rape Tamar. (As I have said many times, the Bible not only speaks about the good side of human being but also the ugly side.) When her brother Absalom heard what had happened to his sister Tamar, he was angry. But, Absalom controlled his anger as he faced Amnon. Why could he behave this way? Because Absalom believed that David, his respected father, would not overlook what Amnon did and would punish him accordingly.

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Fatherly love demands his son to be upright. This is revealed by just punishment. A child learns about the fatherly love through such punishment. The Bible says: **"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."** (I Corinthians 13:6) Love does not overlook evil deeds, but it corrects them. Love rejoices with the truth.

Fromm says a mature individual has both the motherly conscience and fatherly conscience. "Motherly conscience says whatever mistakes you make, I will continue to love you and I hope the best and happiness in your life." Fatherly conscience says: "If you make a mistake, you have to be accounted for your action. If you want me to love you, you must correct your way of living."

Rev. Toyoda said: "A child wants father to be a symbol of righteousness. A child is hurt by a father not showing his love. But he is hurt more by a father whose behavior is contradictory. For example, if father is found to be in an affair, the son does not hate father for not loving his mother but for betraying his mother. The child is hurt not because his father lacks love but because father is not honest. A child knows his father loves him when he is scolded for his mistakes."

Soon afterwards, father David heard about Amnon and Tamar. Upon hearing this, David got angry. But, although David had learned about this, David failed to punish Amnon and did not do anything. We do not know the details. But, David could have been influenced with his own guilty feeling about his relationship with Bathsheba.

When Absalom learned that his father David did not punish Amnon as he should have, Absalom decided to act on his own and killed Amnon. In this way, Absalom rebelled against his father David. But, father David avoided confrontation with his son Absalom. Brothers and sisters, although David was one of the greatest kings of Israel, he was also weak. This Absalom lost his life during his battle with David.

David would not have lost his two sons if David had pointed out Amnon's mistake and took correct action accordingly. **If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.** (Hebrews 12:8) We can say that the fundamental problem of David was that David treated his son as illegitimate.

When we hear such a story, we understand why the Lord carries in his hands the staff of authority and the rod to guide us. This gives us comfort. We are his sheep.

Many of juvenile delinquent youths say that they felt rejected and neglected because their parents failed to scold them. Perhaps these young people were provided

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abundantly with material comfort. But, they felt lonely and unloved because the parents did not scold them sincerely. Perhaps their parents tried to blame themselves for children's actions. The parents knew that they had to steer the children to the right path. But, they condoned their behavior without scolding them. This may result in a superficial peace. But the child knows better. When the parents take blame for children, the children might feel relieved but also feel that they are not loved by parents.

To be honest, I have not seriously considered what an ideal father should do or how a father should reveal his love. But, as I read these stories, I realize what I was lacking and I have not been a good father. I am convinced that the Bible is telling us that God is showing us what a father should be.

We are surprised again for the love of God who has both the motherly and fatherly love and even more. That is why we want to follow the Lord our Shepherd keeping our eyes on his staff of authority and accepting the rod of love leading us to the right path. When we learn this, the familiar scripture section echoes in our heart with a new meaning.

And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." (Hebrews 12:5-6)

We are not illegitimate children. We are children of God who speaks to us with authority and disciplines us with love. God loves us unconditionally, and he shows his love through his demands and guidance. The staff and the rod in the hands of the Lord protect us and are source of our salvation.

Let us pray.

Translated by Dr. Yasuhisa Hosomatsu