

FATHERING

I. PURPOSE OF PARENTING



Warm Up

- > What are the most important things your parents gave you?
- > What do you feel that they didn't give you, but should have?

Study

1// THE PLEA FOR PARENTING

In spite of all the resources available to families, they have never been in a more desperate time. The divorce rate is 40% - 50%, up 500% from 30 years ago; of those married, 20% are unhappily married and 10% are separated; suicide is the third leading cause of death among teenagers; and 11 million anti-depressant prescriptions were written for American children in 2002.

Turning these trends around must first be the responsibility of parents. Toward this end, God made us responsible to give our children two main things: security and significance. These summarize the goal of parenting.

2// SECURITY

Our children need "security" or unconditional love and protection.

"What a man desires is unfailing love." Proverbs 19:22

Our first responsibility is to love our family with our time and affection. However, a study shows that while children watch about 54 hours of TV a week, fathers spend on average 37.7 seconds a day in real contact with their pre-school children. This will not produce loved and secure children.

More than time, our children need a loving, peace-filled home. Of course mom and dad love their children, but they often betray that sentiment by how they relate to each other. Parents that are distant, critical, unforgiving, driven, manipulative, or unsafe, create resentful, insecure children.

"Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged."

Colossians 3:21

Ultimately, loved and secure children are raised by loved and secure parents, for we always give away who we really are.

3// SIGNIFICANCE

Every child wants to be important, to have a life that makes a difference. One author says that "The deepest craving of the human spirit is to find a sense of significance and relevance. This search becomes the ultimate pursuit of man." So how do we help our children live a life of meaning and purpose?

"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6

"Training" means more than giving our children a good education or skill set. It means giving them two things: an understanding of their life purpose, and of the character that is necessary to experience that life. The Bible helps us in both regards. First, it teaches us the meaning of life:

"This is what [God] requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

It also teaches us how to impart character into our children's life:

"[My] commandments... are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Our children's character is formed by us imparting our hearts to them. We do this by "doing life" with them, revealing how God's truth impacts all of life.

The alternative to being intentional is to be busy, filling our children's time with a myriad of activities. But busyness is a poor substitute for purposefulness. Therefore, every parent must ask, "Where am I leading my children?"

4// THE INVITATION

Nearly every parent is uncertain about their parenting, but what makes us great parents is not our perfection, but our willingness to grow. Therefore, the invitation in this series is to learn together what it means to build a home that promotes security and significance, relationship and responsibility, love and purpose. While the road ahead is hard, you will never regret the effort.

Personal Application

- > Which do you personally lean toward, promoting security or significance?
- > Which issue needs the most work? What is one thing you could do this week to help increase that level?

Prayer

What can we pray for in your life?

FATHERING

2. RESPONSIBILITIES



Warm Up

- > Roseanne Barr once answered the question, “If you could re-create the world, what is the one thing you would change?” with, “I would make it a law that no man can hold a position of authority.”¹ How do you think men are typically viewed in our society? Why?
- > What do you think a father uniquely contributes to parenting?

Study

1// MEN’S UNIQUE RESPONSIBILITIES

While society tries to blur the distinction between men and women, God says He created us as equal in worth, yet unique in form and function. “So God created human beings in his own image... male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27
God gave Adam, the first male, two specific responsibilities.

- a. Love. First, Adam was to leave his past and be united to his wife.

“A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.” **Genesis 2:24**

Men are not to just “help” mom run the home. We are to invest our lives into our wife and children, for they need dad’s heart more than his advice, and they need his time more than his pay checks. We love our families, then, when we give them the best of our time and affection.

- b. Leadership. In Genesis 2:19, God called Adam to name the animals, and then, four verses later, to name his wife as well! Naming something implies defining who or what it is. Men do this intentionally and unintentionally.

When we call our kids (or wife) “stupid” or “lazy”, we are negatively naming them. Or, when we don’t shape a child’s beliefs about God, themselves or the world, we are leaving them nameless.

Equally, if we don’t define our children’s life direction, they are just as aimless. This doesn’t mean telling them who to marry or what career to choose, it means modelling what true success is, and providing all that they need to get there — encouragement, instruction, resources, discipline... . Men lead their families, then, when they define and provide.

2// WHAT WENT WRONG?

So men are responsible to give their families love and leadership. If that is our original design, what went wrong? Why do families typically not respect their husbands/fathers as much as men would like? Look at what Adam did when the devil tempted his wife to disobey God:

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” **Genesis 3:6**

Adam was passive in his responsibility to protect and lead his wife. Passivity is easily the crime most committed by men, and leads to the lack of respect most men experience. Listen to the result:

“At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.” **Genesis 3:7**

The result was guilt and division. When we compromise our call to love and lead our families, the effects are catastrophic.

This is supported by what we see in our society. Fatherless homes account for 63% of youth suicides; 90% of homeless children; 85% of children with behaviour problems; 71% of high school dropouts; 85% of youths in prison; 92% higher divorce rate in their children; and children six times more likely to live in poverty.² Clearly, God’s call to fathers to love and lead their families is a necessity for the future, not just of our homes, but of our society in general.

Personal Application

- > Which needs more attention: to love with your time and affection, or to lead by defining your family and providing for their success?
- > What can you do to increase your level of respect in your home?

Prayer

What can we pray for in your life?

¹ Roseanne Barr, “Roseanne” BCTV Sept. 24, 1998.

² www.divorcemag.com/statistics/statsUS.shtml ; David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 42, 46.



Warm Up

- > How did your parents discipline their children? (How, when, who, why...)
- > What was good and not good about what they did?

Study

1// THE CALL TO DISCIPLINE

Last time we described passivity as a father's greatest enemy. An area where men can be particularly passive is in disciplining their children. But it is clearly part of a father's responsibilities:

"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." **Proverbs 22:6**

What is the goal of discipline? While many seek to raise happy, obedient or successful children, the Bible says that our goal is to raise loving children.

*"For the whole law can be summed up in this one command:
Love your neighbor as yourself."* **Galatians 5:14**

This is the purpose of our discipline, meaning that we do not randomly discipline what annoys us. We are "correcting" our children toward loving others — their parents, siblings, friends, teachers, God... even in our absence.

This means that we do not just correct wrong behavior, we must also instill in our children those beliefs and attitudes that promote love and respect.

2// TWO EXTREMES OF UNHEALTHY DISCIPLINE

a. Lawless: ignoring wrong behavior. Through laziness, discouragement, guilt, or not wanting to control, fathers do not give their children proper input.

Passivity punishes children in a way that is far more painful than discipline, for they are left with having to learn from their own experiences instead of ours. And real life experiences can hurt a lot more than our discipline.

*"No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening — it's painful!
But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those
who are trained in this way."* **Hebrews 12:11**

b. Legalistic: enforcing rules. Sometimes out of a belief that it is good for them, or simply out of frustration, fathers are too hard on their children.

*"Don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful.
Rather, bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord
Himself approves."* **Ephesians 6:4**

Typically, men swing between the extremes of lawlessness and legalism by ignoring wrong behavior and then exploding in an attempt to regain control.

3// TWO QUALITIES OF HEALTHY DISCIPLINE

a. Love: the motive of discipline.

"If you love your children, you will correct them." **Proverbs 13:24**

When we act out of anger or frustration, we discipline for our benefit, not theirs. This is not love. While our children might initially comply out of fear, they will grow to resent us in particular and authority in general.

When love is our motive, we correct the right things for the right reasons. The result is children who have a healthy relationship with us, and enjoy the benefits of being loving and responsible individuals.

b. Leadership: the courage to discipline. Societies need governments, businesses need leaders, athletes need coaches... and children need fathers. Just as abusive leadership never produces benefit, nor does the absence of leadership.

"Children will rise to the level of expectation of their parents. Many parents expect little and receive exactly that." Ezzo, 167

Our courage to correct tells our children what we believe they can achieve.

The bottom line is that our personal insecurities and inexperience do not lessen our family's need to have a father who consistently loves and leads them.

"Correct your children while there is still hope; do not let them destroy themselves."
Proverbs 19:18

Personal Application

- > To which side are you more tempted to swing, being lawless or legalistic?
- > Which do you need to develop more, the motive or the courage to discipline?

Prayer

What can we pray for in your life?

FATHERING

4. MARRIAGE



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Warm Up

- > When did you get married? What attracted you to your wife?
- > What has surprised you about marriage?

Study

I// HOW DOES OUR MARRIAGE AFFECT OUR PARENTING?

Society tries to downplay a marriage's impact on children:

"You know, some parents, get along much better when they don't live together. They don't fight all the time and they can become better people. And much better mommies and daddies for you." Mrs. Doubtfire
But the studies agree that the negative affects of marital conflict and divorce on children are profound: "depression, withdrawal, poor social competence, poor academic performance, health problems, a variety of conduct-related difficulties," and a 50% higher rate of divorce.¹ This reality led one author to conclude that "The greatest overall influence you will have on your children will not come in your role as a dad but as a husband." (Ezzo, 58)

2// WHAT DOES A HEALTHY MARRIAGE GIVE OUR CHILDREN?

a. *Security.* While children may begin by asking, "Why doesn't daddy love mommy?" Eventually they will ask, "How can I trust dad's love when he doesn't even love my mom?" We have a choice in our marriage then, to reveal to our children relationships that are built on performance or unconditional love. The latter builds long-term security in our children.

b. *Significance.* We can parent our children with wise words, rich experiences and loving discipline. But what we model to our children tells them what we really believe is significant. Therefore, when we love their mother, we are teaching them what is really important in life. Our mandate is clear:

"Each one of you must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." **Ephesians 5:33**

History has proven that the moral foundation of not just our children but of society rises or falls on a man's ability to love one woman for a lifetime. Fathering, then, is a cause and effect enterprise, meaning that what we sow into our wife, we will reap in our children.

"Do not be deceived: A man reaps what he sows." **Galatians 6:7**

3// WHAT DO HUSBANDS DO?

So how do men undermine establishing security and significance, love and purpose in the home? It is through selfishness. Self-centeredness is easily the biggest cause of marital discord, yet this runs contrary to popular opinion: "Woundedness is treated as a far more serious problem than self-centeredness... When I talked with these [couples] it became clear that no one thought of his or her self-centeredness as a serious problem. When each one thought about this commitment to self at all, it seemed not only as natural as breathing, but entirely justified." (Crabb, 29,26)
God calls men to stop avoiding "pain" and to start doing what He told us to do:

a. Love. Love is a motive, where we speak and act for the benefit of others.

"Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." **Colossians 3:19**

Loving our wife looks like expressing gratitude, demonstrating forgiveness, serving proactively, and initiating conversations, just to listen. When love is present, even working through problems can be a unifying experience.

b. Leadership. Even though parenting is a partnership, God has called men to lead their wives (Ephesians 5:23). While we see how important leadership is elsewhere, our own home is often a blind spot: we just can't see where we're needed, or believe that our leadership would be appreciated.

Certainly our selfishness has undermined our leadership; nevertheless, God made us goal-oriented, and the goal He gave us husbands is to build a secure and significant home out of the complexity of family life. Our loving leadership will turn chaos into purpose, and busyness into plans.

Marital pain is experienced when a wife feels unloved and a husband feels disrespected. We will slowly reverse that cycle by serving our wives and by leading our families toward security and significance. As we do, our wives will feel loved and we will receive the respect we've always wanted.

Personal Application

- > Love: What are you grateful for in your marriage? When will you tell her that?
- > Leadership: What is a noble purpose or goal for your wife and marriage?

Prayer

What can we pray for in your life?

¹ www.relationshipcoachinginstitute.com/coaching-case.htm.



Warm Up

- > What was your parents “religion”? Did it affect their parenting?
- > What do your children think about God and faith?

Study

I// PARENTING AND FAITH

Marx described religion as the opiate of the masses and Nietzsche proclaimed that God is dead. Yet God created us, not just with a physical body, but an eternal spirit — a spirit that, unlike Marx and Nietzsche, is not dead.

Typically, fathers have not given much spiritual input to their families. However, fathers can't help but shape their children's view of God. A clinical study asked a test group about their views of God and then a few weeks later asked about their relationship with their parents. Look at the similarities:

BELIEFS ABOUT PARENTS	BELIEFS ABOUT GOD
“The provider in my family was my father because he worked.”	“I think that God provides for my needs because he watches over us.”
“I was never close to my father.”	“I have never experienced closeness to God.”
“I do not ask anything from my father”	“If I am in distress I do not resort to God, because I have no belief in God.”
“My father always insisted I make the best use of my abilities.”	“If there is a God, then I have dissatisfied him, because I have not made the best use of my abilities.”

“A child is not likely to find a father in God unless he finds something of God in his father.” (Frank Martin, p107, 1994)

Ultimately, it is our own faith that has the greatest impact on our children's faith. For instance, research shows that if the father is the first to attend church, then 93% of their families follow, versus only 17% if mothers attend first! (Barna, 1999). The fact is, our spiritual influence is unavoidable.

2// HOW GOD HELPS US LEAD OUR CHILDREN SPIRITUALLY

Fathers seldom feel confident in spiritually leading their homes. Fortunately, God offers us more than a superficial kind of help. He gives fathers a personal experience, a source of truth and a new life:

- a. Fathering — Our struggles in parenting often tie back to our own lack of being fathered. Our Heavenly Father is eager to give us what we lack:

“I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons, says the Lord Almighty.”

2 Corinthians 6:18

God stands unique among “deities” in that He actually initiates a personal relationship with us.

- b. Truth — when we build our parenting on human opinion, no wonder our children question us! But when we build our parenting on God's truth, we give our children a solid spiritual foundation and a true life compass.

“Fix these words of [God] in your hearts and minds. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land.” **Deuteronomy 11:18-21**

- c. Salvation — the best gift we can give our kids is not an expensive vacation or the latest toy, but to live a life that is truly transformed by Jesus Christ.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.” **Acts 16:31**

As we deepen our own relationship with God, we can give to our children what they really need, not just what we have been able to provide.

3// CONCLUSION

Many of us feel like the harm we've caused our families is irreversible. But when we live for God, He promises to not only bless future generations, He will even repair our present relationships.

“He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.” **Malachi 4:6**

Personal Application

- > What kind of God are you presenting to your children?
- > What can you do, to give your children a better relationship with God?

Prayer

What can we pray for in your life?