

The Man in the Mirror

Solving the 24 Problems Men Face

Children: How to Avoid Regrets

Unedited Transcript

Proverbs 22:6, 15; Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21, Acts 16:31

Well, good morning men! This morning we're going to be talking about children and how to avoid regrets. I guess it's the 8th chapter in *The Man in the Mirror* book. Before we get going on that, though, let's go ahead and do a couple of shout outs. We have two; the first group is Divine Impact of Living Word Church right here in Orlando, FL. 7 men who meet at the church weekly on Fridays at 7:00pm using the Video Bible Study. Led by Natanael Colon and Pat Leupold is the Area Director for this region of Florida.

The second shout out today goes to the Victory Zamboanga All Inclusive Ministry to Men of Victory Christian Fellowship Church in Zamboanga City, Philippines. All Inclusive Ministry to Men is a key concept of the No Man Left Behind Model, so thanks guys for picking up on that. 20 men who have been meeting for 3 years at the church weekly on Fridays at 7:00pm using the Video Bible Study. Led by Joseph Jr. Araneta and we currently have no Area Directors internationally. So I wonder if you would join me in welcoming these men to the Man in the Mirror Men's Bible Study? One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys, we are glad to have you with us!

The series is The Man in the Mirror, today Children: How to Avoid Regrets. So my wife and I went out to dinner last week. As we pulled up to a stop light, there was a young man on a motor scooter in front of us at the stop light. He had on headphones, he did not have on a helmet. It was a motor scooter, and he was sitting there texting, waiting for the light to change. The light changed and we pulled out onto the main road, which happens to be a big arching curve that goes up towards the interstate highway. It's about a thousand feet, and he took off, headphones on, no helmet, motor scooter, texting all the way around the curve. We get to the traffic light up to the interstate where the off ramp comes off the interstate, and the light turns yellow. He continues to drive, he continues to text. The light turns red, one thousand, two thousand, three thousand, and he hit the line and drove right through the intersection. I said to my wife, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child! I wonder what the life expectancy of that young guy is?"

The problem of fathering for performance

First up, we want to talk about fathering for performance. What I'm going to do this morning is I'm going to stick fairly close to the book, *The Man in the Mirror*, but I'm also going to loop in some ideas. We have four books that deal with fathering. We have the chapter in *The Man in the Mirror*, we have a book called *The Dad in the Mirror*, and I'm going to be drawing from that this morning. There's a chapter in *Man Alive* with ten practical ideas on how to really love your kids, and then I have this book, *The Young Man in the Mirror*, which is written specifically to teenage boys, it's a book for them, and they actually

help me put the scheme of the book together. So, I'm going to be cobbling some of these things together this morning.

The problem of fathering for performance; you should be at Colossians 3:21. Let's look at the instructions that the Bible gives to fathers, and by the way, there are not that many, but they're pretty clear. 21:

²¹ Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

To embitter means to stir to anger or rouse up to anger, and so the idea is that the father ends up the enemy instead of the friend of the child. Then if you would turn back a few pages to Ephesians 6:4. If you don't want to flip around, that's fine, you can just listen:

⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children...

This means to provoke to anger or create resentment, so kind of the same idea; different words but same idea. Now we get into the instruction:

... instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Well, what's the problem? Well the problem is you got all these kids running around on these motor scooters! Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, right? Let's take a look at that verse, too, that's Proverbs 22:15. Here's what it says:

¹⁵ Folly is bound up in the behavior of a child...

Right? You looking at it? It doesn't say that! It doesn't say folly is bound up in the behavior of a child, it says:

¹⁵ Folly is bound up in the behavior of a child...

So there's this problem that we have because men are by nature performance oriented. We live in a performance oriented culture, and so most of us when we become Christians, we import that! That idea that we're rewarded based on our performance, and we bring that into our own relationship with God, that we're trying to perform to make God happy or avoid his wrath or earn merit, whatever the case may be. Then, not only that, but when we begin to teach Christianity to our children and raise them up in the ways of the Lord, we have a tendency to do the same thing with them, to focus on their outward behavior. Are they doing the right things? You can get a child to do the right things based on the size of the reward or the fear of the punishment. So if you have a child who is not getting good grades because they have poor study habits, you can make a deal. You can make a deal with your kid to reward them with money or privileges, and get good grades out of them for however long it lasts. But the idea in Christianity is that when you father the heart, you actually begin to focus on what are the motivations that are inside the child's heart. All of this, these ideas, this is the Biblical idea, and this is set in a context of our culture; a culture in which dads are very busy, trying to figure out how to earn enough money to pay for all the labels for the kids to wear, and all the things that mom wants, and be the super dad that's always there for the soccer games and so forth. So when a guy adopts the three impoverished values of culture, the rat race, the unexamined life, and cultural Christianity, then he gets busy, and it's difficult to find enough time for the children.

Watch this: James Dobson, who is the man who has helped many of us learn to father our children, although I learned most of what I know from that man right there, Lyle Nelson, in a parenting class that he and his wife led when our children were coming up. James Dobson says that, "Business is destroying the family. Business is what's destroying marriages." It's just that simple! James Dobson, the leading expert in this area attributes most of what we see to business. In fact, he cited some research in which fathers were asked to self-report how much time they spent with their kids. The average was 15-20 minutes a day that fathers reported having with their children. But in the social sciences, it's well known that when you self-report, you have a tendency to make yourself look better than you really are. So they did a follow up with the same dads who thought they were spending 15-20 minutes a day with their children. They put microphones on them. As it turns out, the actual amount of time that fathers were spending with their children was 37 seconds a day, in about 2.5 interactions or so of about 10 seconds each. 37 seconds! Not much time to raise your children in the instruction of God, is it?

The problem is that there really isn't enough time to change the core affections of the child's heart unless you actually invest this time, and the result is when we do this or don't do this is that children become embittered. Children become exasperated, children become discouraged; in fact, the greatest need your children have is for encouragement! So what is courage? Courage, according to the dictionary, is the quality or state of mind or spirit that enables one to face hardship or disaster with confidence and resolution. Well, what does it mean then to encourage? To encourage means to inspire your kids to have courage! And that takes time, and we need to do that by fathering the heart and not fathering for performance. So the Big Idea today... if you have one take away, this particular idea is not in *The Man in the Mirror*. This idea is from *The Dad in the Mirror*, but this is the idea I want you to take away this morning: **Encourage children by fathering their hearts, not fathering for performance.** This is the biggest distinction in parenting, fathering for performance versus fathering the heart. Fathering for performance is to get the right behavior, illicit the right behavior, to get our kids to do the right thing, get the right grades, say the right things, to be polite and act Christianly so they don't embarrass us in church; all these different things. But fathering the hearts is getting at the core beliefs that are inside the child. It's not behavior that determines belief, it is belief that determines behavior. So if we get at the core beliefs of our kids and help them to think correctly, train them in the gospel, and help them understand grace, then we can encourage our children. Let's move on.

How a disciple fathers his children differently

I want to talk about how a disciple fathers his children differently. Proverbs 22:6, we were just at 22:15. Proverbs 22:6 says this:

⁶ Train a child in the way he should go,
and when he is old he will not turn from it.

This is in the beliefs, training the child in what they believe and what they understand about Jesus, the gospel. Then the behavior, the idea is that the behavior comes out of the overflow of the changed mind. Then in Proverbs 22:15, again folly is bound up in the heart of a child:

... but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.

So I think I should do a side bar on spanking. This is an area of liberty for Christian parents, there is no single right or wrong answer. You are free to discipline the hearts of your children however you see fit. However, if you decide to spank, not if ever, but whenever you spank your child to make you feel better,

that's not called spanking for discipline. That's called violence. Any time that you spank a child to make you feel better, you have just passed over from disciplining, fathering the heart of the child to violence. That's the side bar for today.

The purpose of discipline, the purpose of spanking if you do it or whatever kind of discipline, is not to conform the behavior of the child to a set of rules and regulations. You can raise your children under law, you can do that. You can raise your children under grace or law, but grace is better, because if you choose to raise your children under the law, in other words, trying to control their behavior, what's going to happen is they're going to turn 18 and they're going to join the 60% of kids that walk away from God and the church, and many of them don't want anything to do with their parents anymore, because their parents were not interested in what was going on inside of them, their hearts. They were only interested in their behavior, and it was discouraging to them. They don't really feel like their parents care about what's going on inside of them, so they walk away. Some of us have had that happen, and it's sad.

Ephesians 6:4 gives the instruction, and it says:

⁴ Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Father their hearts as opposed to getting them to conform to some sort of behavior code. You're going to get a chance not only to discuss this with your own kids but among yourselves in a little bit when you do the questions. The Big Idea today: encourage children by fathering their hearts rather than fathering for performance.

5 practical ideas to encourage the heart

Now I want to give you five practical ideas that you can use to father their hearts or encourage their hearts. Last time when we were talking about broken relationships in general, I mentioned that men who are fifty years of age and older were sharing with me what their greatest regrets are, one of the main regrets was when their children were growing up, they were too busy for them. Now that they are older and have time, their kids really don't want anything to do with them. So these are five practical ideas to also help address that particular issue.

Number one, freedom to be kids. I love nice things, I've always loved nice things, I thank God for nice things! I love beauty, I love aesthetics, I love quality, I love competence, I love excellence. I don't root for underdogs, I always root for the best team. I just like excellence, that's just a personality thing. We bought a beautiful coffee table for our home when our kids were little. It was magnificent! And there it sat in the middle of our family room. Then the kids started becoming toddlers, and drooling all over my table. Then bite marks on my table, and little scratches from toys beating up against the legs, and I would go crazy every time something would happen to this table! Finally, after a couple years my wife had had enough, she said, "Stop! I will not have you ruining a million dollar child over a three hundred dollar table!" and finally it sunk in! How crazy is that? That I would be so materialistic that I would want this table intact more than my children's hearts? Talk about fathering for performance! Putting up a three foot buffer around that table and saying you better not go inside! Giving them the freedom to be kids and not bringing adult rules and regulations into the equation.

One time our daughter had a spat with another child in the neighborhood. I came home and Patsy invited me to sit with them. Our daughter's name is Jen. At the office, you fix things, you solve problems. People bring you a problem and you listen and say great! Just do this, that and the other and boom! Everything will be okay! So I listened attentively to Jen talk about all her emotions in the little spat that was taking place. Then I said, okay Jen! Just do this, this, and that, and everything will be all right. Then she really started crying, and she said, "Dad, from now on, when I'm crying, would you please not say anything that's logical." Giving kids the freedom to be kids.

Our son John. We told our kids they could do anything as long as it wasn't permanent while they're in our house. If they wanted to get piercings or tattoos later, that's fine, but under our house no. You have the freedom to do other things, to experiment, and if you don't let your kids experiment now, they will experiment later! So we wanted to let them do a little experimenting. Our son decided he wanted to grow his hair long. He got the nick name around the school, the mop. Then he decided he wanted to bleach his hair. We said okay, it turned orange, so he was the orange mop for about a year. But the point is that we were more interested in what was going on in his heart than trying to get him to conform to outward behavior patterns, you see? Of course, he's one of the most wonderful young men now that you'll ever possibly meet! Give them the freedom to be kids.

Number two, protect them from the world. I had a sort of a run in with a young father who happened to have a small girl, about a two or three year old daughter, when I made a comment about Miley Cyrus and twerking. He thought I should mind my own business. Here it is from Google. What is twerking? Google: Twerking is to dance to popular music in a sexual provocative manner involving thrusting hip movements and a low squatting stance. All right. This man who has this two or three year old daughter, I guarantee he's going to change his tune in about ten years! The idea is not to insulate our children from what's going on in the world, but we do have a responsibility to protect them from this world. Not wise, but young and foolish folly is bound up in the heart of a child; not wisdom bound up in the heart of a child, folly is bound up in the heart of a child and our role as parents is to help them discern what is wise and what is foolish. Beyoncé after the super bowl performance she gave, I put a Facebook post up on that. It was the biggest response I've ever had to a Facebook post and I titled my post I Am Sad Today. I've told this story here before, but my wife and I were watching the show. My wife says, "She has such a beautiful smile!" I laughed and I said, "Patsy, I can assure you, there's not a man on this planet right now who is looking at her smile!" I believe that Beyoncé is a wonderful human being, I really do, but I think she's also very confused. In fact, the whole world seems to be a little upside down right now. It's like the story about the king who lived up on the hill. The people were down in the valley, and wicked witch came and put some poison into the well that turned the people mad, and they took off their clothes and ran around naked and did crazy things. The king up on the hill observed this and remained normal. The people in the valley began to think the king was acting strange because he wasn't naked and running around and acting stupid and crazy. One day, the king came down to be among the people and he drank some of the water, he went crazy, he took off his clothes and started acting weird. The people rejoiced because their king had been healed! That's the kind of culture that we're trying to protect our kids from. So freedom to be kids and protect them from the world.

Number three, encourage them with words. There are many ways to encourage them, but I want to focus on words today, because one of the most traumatic things that has ever happened to me happened at a high school basketball game where my son was playing point guard and my mother and father came to the game. They had never been to see my son play basketball. So I'm sitting here, my mother, my father, and my wife are to my side. I was telling my mother that we are just so proud of John! He's so industrious, he's learning leadership principles and team play and all these great lessons

that you learn from team sports! We're just showering him and letting him know how much we love him and how proud we are of him constantly. My mom says to nobody in particular, "You know, when our four boys were growing up, I don't think we told them often enough that we love them and we're proud of them." An explosion went off in my brain! I had these two conflicting thoughts: first was that's right! You didn't do that! Why didn't you do that? It would have been so easy to do that! Just to let us know that you loved us and you were proud of us! Why didn't you do that? Then the second thought going through my head was it's not too late mom! It's not too late, you can do it now, you can tell me now! Men, in the name of Jesus, I adjure you, tell your children every day I love you, I'm proud of you! Every opportunity that you get! And if your kids are already grown up, call them on the phone today and tell them how much you love them and how proud you are of them! Not without Biblical precedent. When the Father came in the form of the Holy Spirit at the Baptism of Jesus, also the transfiguration, what did he say? This is my beloved son. I love him! In whom I am well pleased. I'm proud of him! So encourage your children with words. Father the heart with words. You can father for performance with words, too. I want you home by six o'clock, do this, blah blah blah. So freedom to be kids, protection from the world, and encourage them with words.

Four, spend time with them, especially you young dads! When our daughter turned 12, her friends became very important to her. I realized that at 12 years of age, something like 85-90% of the time that I would be able to spend with her had already been expended, because her friends became very important to her and she was always wanting to be with them. I dated my kids, I encourage you to date your kids. We had Tuesdays as date night, we had two children so I just alternated back and forth. Of course there were holidays, vacations and things like that. I knew all through my kids growing up years that I was going to have about twenty evenings a year with each child where it would just be the two of us, where we could go do something fun. The Little 500 Go Kart Track, my son loved that so we were up at that go kart track all the time. My daughter liked to go up to the mall, so we were up at the mall all the time, and we'd get something to eat as well. So spend time with your kids. I think this was one of the great lessons I got from Lyle and Marge Nelson in their parenting class. These are very devious people by the way, these Nelsons! They invited us to their parenting class. It started with a family picnic. Lyle's a shutterbug so he's taking snaps of all the families. On the first night of the meeting, he starts out the meeting playing the song the Cats and the Cradle and then projecting this collage of pictures. My kids up on the screen and playing in the background, "... when you coming home dad? I don't know when, but we'll get together then, son. You know we'll have a good time then." I'm seeing my kids up there and I'm balling! I've only been a father for three years and I'm already a failure! So very devious guy, that Lyle Nelson, but it did inspire me to want to father their hearts and spend time with them.

Fifth idea, guardianship through prayer. And by the way, obviously, quite obviously, I'm leaving a lot of things out here today, but that's why I wanted to make you aware of those other books in case you wanted to pluck some of those out. That chapter in *Man Alive* on how to have healthy relationships, those ten ideas are the ten best ideas that I think I've run across. Guardianship through prayer. I would encourage you to have a list of things that you pray for, your children. You can thumb through this book, *The Man in the Mirror* and the chapter back in the book table and just get an idea, but come up with a list of ideas that you're praying for your kids for every day or almost every day. Most important of all is to pray for their salvation.

The leader of this table who is no longer with us, Jim Walton, was part of a group of seven couples. Among them, they had twenty-three children, none of whom were born again, none of whom had faith in Jesus. They were all new Christians themselves, and they stumbled across a verse, Acts 16:31:

Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household.

And they decided to believe that for their children, and they began to pray that every week when they got together for Bible Study, and twenty-four months later, all twenty-three children had prayed to receive Jesus Christ. Pray for your children.

The Big Idea today: encourage your children by fathering their hearts, not fathering for performance. Let's tie it off with a prayer, then we'll go to the tables for discussion.

Closing Prayer

Our dearest Father, Lord, thank you so much for your word. You only need a few verses, Lord, to communicate what we need to know. The practical application of it, of course, is another thing. I pray Father as we now discuss the questions that you would help us to think about what this means to each of us personally. What is the one question that we most need to have answered for our own parenting today? Help these men. For those men whose children are grown, show them how they can pass this along to their own children who are now parenting. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen!