

Fathering and the Man in the Mirror

You Can Always Be A Great Dad

Unedited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. We are going to start a new series this morning on fathering and the Man in the Mirror. Before we get to that, let's go ahead and do a shout out to the Enterprise Baptist Men's Group led by James Taylor in Enterprise, Mississippi, part of the Enterprise Baptist Church. Six guys who have been meeting for about year on Sundays at 5:30 PM. I wonder if you would join me in giving a warm and a rousing Man in the Mirror welcome to the Enterprise Baptist Men's Group. One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, guys. We're glad to have you with us.

Going to start from time to time, maybe every week if I can remember to do it, tell a little story about something that's going on in the ministry of Man in the Mirror. We, together, are Man in the Mirror. We know that we have 6000 people joining us every week, many of those are in groups through downloads around the world. We also have lots of other things going on that are all sort of ... Well, this is the Petri dish where these things get started. One of the things that we have done is we've taken the materials that we've developed here and put them into seminars. We've done 1300 church-based seminars, mostly in the United States with the faculty that has been as many as 25 at different times.

I thought I'd share a story with you about a man named Tony, not his real name. He attended one of these events, these church events. As the next right step, he went into an eight-week book study of the book Man Alive that was conducted at the recovery house where he was living. Our field staff, Steve, said toward the end of this study at the last week of the study, they asked the question, "How has this study affected you?" I wanted to share with you what Tony said. He said, "I used to be the biggest piece of trash in town. Everyone feared or hated me because I was either high, drunk, or pissed off. Last week, something happened to cause me to realize that I'm a different man."

Here's the story. His ex-wife had become pregnant, was going to have a child with Tony's best friend. He's 37 years old, he's been addicted and incarcerated and in and out of prison since he's fifteen. He's just kind of known for barroom brawls and a fierce temper. In his ex-wife's hour of need, his best friend abandoned her. He was livid. This is in the final week in the eight-week Man Alive book study. He decided that he was going to kill his best friend so he drove over to his house and pulled into his driveway.

Here's what he said. "As I pulled into his drive, a peace came over me. My rage disappeared and I felt the need to pray for him. I prayed and left and then I went to my ex-wife and pledged my support to her and my kids, even the unborn son of my best friend." Then he said, "I feel a love for my children and ex-wife that I can't explain. I love them with no expectation of getting anything in return. I just want a better life for them and I need to make it happen regardless of the results for me. I know God loves me and is there to guide me. I don't have to do it by myself. I have a peace I've never had before." Then he said, "God gave me an amazing blessing as well. My four-year-old daughter looked very sad when I was

leaving and I asked her, 'What's wrong?' She said, 'I want my daddy, my new daddy.' Even she saw how much I have changed."

This is the kind of thing that's happening as a result of the work that we are doing together to make disciples who are making disciples, starting at home. Seems appropriate for that story to roll into our series this week on fathering. Fathering and the Man in the Mirror. For the first week, the title of the message is You Can Always Be a Great Dad. You Can Always Be a Great Dad.

Open your bibles, if you would with me, to Mark chapter 12. I should have said that at the very beginning. By the way, the reason I usually open with "open your bible to such and such," in this case, Mark chapter 12 is because I want to set the tone that this is a bible study and we're not looking for human wisdom. We're looking for what God has to say about how a man can be the man that God wants him to be, a man like Tony is becoming. Mark chapter 12 verse 29 is where we want to be.

We all know that there are lots of problems with the generations, trying to get every new generation of children established. It seems that every generation, we complain more. That may or may not be true. For whatever the situation is and however it happened, fathers are God's designated way to solve whatever problems each new generation faces. It's not government. Government's important. It's not even churches. Church is important. Fathers are the designated way, and mothers but we're talking about fathers today, of solving whatever problems, whatever challenges there are that the children face. We could ask this question: What is it that the fathers are trying to accomplish with their children? What is the mission of a father? You just have to start here. You just have to start here.

Mark chapter 12 verse 29, the most important of all the commandments, Jesus says, is this, "Here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." That's called the Shema, S-H-E-M-A, in the Old Testament. "The Lord our God is one. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind and with all of your strength, everything that's within you." The second is like it, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Then, Jesus says, "There is no commandment greater than these."

The idea of helping our children to love God and love others from the heart is the core of our mission. That's not all. This Shema, where does it come from? Turn back, if you would, to Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 4 and hear the word of God. "Here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." That was the Shema that Jesus was quoting. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength. These commandments I give you today are to be upon your performance." He's says they're to be on your hearts. The idea is that it's not a rule, a set of rules, but rather it is something that the Lord God is trying to put deep into our hearts, sort of a perspective, a principle of life as opposed to a set of dos and don'ts.

"Impress them," this command to love God. "Impress them on your children, talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads," if you're a Hasidic Jew. "Write them on the door frames of your houses and your gates." That was the principle of the Old Testament.

Then, if you would, turn to Psalm 78 where David ... Actually, this is the Psalm of Asaph. Verse 1. He says, "Oh my people, hear my teaching. Listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth and parables I will utter hidden things from old things we have heard and known, things our fathers have told us." There, you see this concept of an intergenerational transfer of spiritual wisdom and knowledge.

Where did this knowledge come from? Our fathers have told us. What will we do with this knowledge? Next verse, "We will not hide them from their children. We will tell the next generation." That's how it is. Disciples making disciples starting at home. That's the principle of the Old Testament. I don't think we'll keep reading but you can read some of those other verses there as well.

When we look at this, what's the main obstacle to all of this? The main obstacle is this. It's the problem of fathering for performance. In particular, the Old Testament which is a set of laws, three kinds, ceremonial laws, judicial laws, and then moral laws, the ten commandments, all of which no longer apply. Those laws came about because of the basic principle of this world is that your value is based on your performance. Kids learn this at a very early age. If it's a game of kickball and they're no good, then they don't get picked. If they don't get good grades, then they don't get into the honors society or the special programs. If they don't have the proper labels, then they're not allowed to be with the cool kids. If their physical appearance is a little off, they might not be able to run with the crowd that they want. Very early on, kids learn that one of the basic values of the world we live in is performance. The problem of course is that dads are supposed to be the solution for this but dads often contribute to the problem by putting extra pressure, putting structures in place that reinforce what the world is teaching them instead of being a place where the kids can come for unconditional love and acceptance. We'll talk more about this.

I want us to look at one final verse and that's Colossians chapter 3 verse 21 which says, "Fathers, do not embitter your children or they will become discouraged." Fathers, do not exasperate your children or they will become discouraged. When we father for performance and when we communicate to our kids that their value is based on how well they're able to behave in public, not talk back when they're spoken to, all of the different things that are behavior modification oriented, trying to get our children to do the right things. They do become discouraged. The scripture, knowing that you and I live in a performance-based culture and knowing that our tendency is to fall right into line with that and to parent our kids to get them to perform, to do the right things, the principle instruction to fathers here is don't do that. Don't exasperate your kids because if you do, they will become discouraged. 80% of kids today are discouraged because of this culture which is often reinforced by their dads.

If the problem is that our kids become discouraged when we father for performance, what is the opposite of to discourage? It's to encourage. What does encourage mean? To encourage means to inspire to have courage. What is courage? The dictionary defines courage this way. Courage is the ability or the state of mind or spirit to face hardship or disaster with confidence and resolution. The ability and/or state of mind or spirit that enables one, our children, to face hardship or disaster, in other words, the pressure of not getting good grades. I mean, it doesn't take much trouble to be the parent of a child who's getting good grades, who makes the team, who makes the right decisions but every child will have times when they're not getting good grades, when they don't make the team, when they're running with the wrong crowd, when hardship or disaster comes on them. This is the time when they can either be encouraged or they can be discouraged.

It's not the world system. It's not the outside world. It's not the world that's saying your value's based on your performance that's going to encourage them. There's only one place where that child is going to get encouragement and that's at home, maybe if lucky, has a Christian friend. The only dependable place for that child, by design of God, to get the encouragement that will keep them from becoming discouraged is at home and God says to the dads, "Don't be part of the problem. You're the solution." Fathering is the solution. Fathering the heart is God's plan. Not fathering for performance, but fathering the heart is the solution.

Here's the Big Idea for the day. **Encouragement is the food of the heart and every heart is a hungry heart.** Every child has a heart that hungers to be inspired to have courage. Encouragement, it's the food of the heart and every heart is a hungry heart. You'll see that again. Then, if the problem is fathering performance, what's the solution? How do we do this encouragement? It's fathering the heart. The solution is fathering the heart. How do we do that? Well, we do that two ways: with unconditional love and then also providing the proper structure.

Larry Crab, the counselor, this was like when our kids were like that tall and that tall, Patsy and I attended a seminar at The Cove. It was actually before it was The Cove. It was the predecessor to The Cove, the Billy Graham Training Center up in Nashville. He said something that I don't remember anything else he said that weekend, but I remember this. He said, "Our children need to know: yes, I love you and no, you can't have your own way." You might want to write that down. Our children need to know: yes, I love you and no, you can't have your own way. Yes, I love you, unconditional love, that your value is not based on your performance, your value is based on that you're my child. No matter how bad you screw up, I will always love you. That's unconditional love. Then, structure. No, you can't have your own way.

My wife, when we were married, she said, "You know, when you were growing up, your parents, they just gave you too much say." There was a decided lack of structure in my home. I quit high school. My next brother quit high school. Brother, he died of a heroine overdose. My next brother, employment problems basically all of his life, struggle with alcohol for a period. My youngest brother, alcoholic, drugs, divorce. You know, there was just a decided lack of structure.

I can't do what I want to do today and go through this, but in the book *The Dad in the Mirror*, I asked and we do have a few copies out there, I take that idea and I take it a little further than Larry did. David and I coauthored that book, David Delk. What we did is that we took that phrase, "Yes, I love you and no, you can't have your own way." We looked at the four possibilities there. No, I don't love you and yes, you can have your own way. Yes, I love you and yes, you can have your own way. No, I don't love you and no, you can't have your own way. Then, yes, I love you and no, you can't have your own way. Just looked at the four kinds of dads that came out of that. The disconnected dad, "Yeah, no, I don't love you. Yes, you can do whatever you want." Then, authoritarian, permissive, and then the affirming father or the encouraging father, "Yes, I love you and no, you can't have your own way."

It's a perspective. The fathering for performance is getting our children to do the right things, a half truth. Fathering the heart is helping our children do the right things for the right reasons. Not only asking the question, "What is it that they're doing and how can I get their outward behavior to conform to the way that I think it should be," but it's asking, "Why are they doing that? What is the motivation of their heart that's causing them to do that?"

One little example, I suppose. If your thirteen-year-old son comes to you and wants to go see an R-rated movie with his friends, you could have many different reactions, but the affirming way or the encouraging way would be to put down whatever it is you're doing and say, "Well, son. Can you tell me do you know what that movie's about?" Let him describe to you. Then, you can ask him, "Do you think that that's the kind of appropriate movie that someone, a thirteen-year-old, should be able to go and see?" Reason it out with him. Taking the time just so that not only are you ... You're going to say no anyway, right? Hopefully, you're going to say no. "No, you can't have your own way," but making sure the child goes away with also the understanding, "Yes, I love you." Hey, both of our kids got together and they told me, when they were in high school, said, "Dad, we don't want you to be our best friend.

We want you to be our dad." I can't remember what I was screwing up at the time but that's what they said.

The big idea here is this. Encouragement is the food of the heart and every heart is a hungry heart. Finally, these ten deposits for the hearts of your kids. This is a fool's errand and I'm not going to be able to really delve into all these ten but I'll do a deep dive on a couple of them. I want to make sure that I give them all to you. I'm taking these straight out of the same book that Tony got his ideas about being a better husband and father, the book *Man Alive*. These are these ten ideas that are right out of that book. I'm going to put up the first five and you can write these down.

Pay your kids to read the bible. These are ways that you can encourage your kids with unconditional love and structure. Every parent, every Christian parent, wants their kids to love God and to love others, the text that we looked at. There's just something about putting your kids into the scriptures. One of our area directors, Peter Hone, it's interesting because his father-in-law sat down with him every day, he was a young adult, doesn't mean he's not a child. His father-in-law sat down with him every day and would witness to him. Peter, by his own admission, was not a good person. He had 400 employees in this big company in South Africa and by his own admission, he was not a good person. Started meeting with his father-in-law and just every day would just talk to him about Jesus. Then, he got ahold of the bible on audio and the started listening to the bible. When he heard the words, the word of God, when he heard the words, "I am the way and the truth and the life," he knew that it was true and he was transformed, radically transformed by the word of God.

Kids are motivated by money. Pay them money. I've talked about how I paid our kids here before. You can come up with clever schemes. You don't have to buy the book. You can thumb through it out there and see what Patsy and I did. Give it a try. Is it bribery? Yeah. Does it work? Yeah. The bottom line is that all through high school and middle school, my kids read the bible, none of their friends did and that's that.

Second is **lead family devotions**. I was coming in here on Friday mornings teaching you guys all these great things that I spent hours and hours and hours. I spent between 15 and 25 hours a week on this. Typically, between 10 to 15 hours. I'm giving you guys all this stuff and then I'm not doing nothing for my kids. One day, I said, "What in the world are you doing?" I devised a little way, three, four days a week, 15 minutes before school. Set a timer so they're not late. Take something out of the newspaper, something that's going on in school or the neighborhood, then find a verse that relates to it and then close with a pray. "Lord, let us have a good day" prayers. We added somebody. We said, "Well, who's somebody in the school or in the neighborhood or somebody that we know that we can pray for to give the prayer a little bit more meaning?" Take summers off. Sleep schedules are all different in the summer. Three, four days a week. Don't make it a law, somebody's running late, that's that. To actually lead family devotions, this is at the heart of disciples making disciples starting at home, all of these things are.

Set work boundaries. I never work past 6:00, I never work weekends, and I never work nights. Now, I have the ability to do that. Maybe you don't have that kind of a job. To set some very specific work boundaries. Here's the rule that I would suggest of the twenty that I could in the time that we have. Make your work appointments in pencil and your family appointments in pen. Got it? Put your work appointments in pencil, you family appointments in pen.

Make your family your number one ministry. Can I just read to you what I wrote here because I can't say it as well I wrote it? That's why I like writing because I get a chance to correct all the stupid things that I say. What's the number? Four. "No one else cares about your family like you do. You have to be strong and you have to set boundaries. No one else can or should take responsibility to disciple your family. That one's on you. Your most important small group, prayer group, fellowship group, discipleship group, and ministry is your family." Watch this. "Until you get that right, you really shouldn't be doing ministry anywhere else." Did you hear what I said? Until you are discipling your family properly, that doesn't mean that they're responding the way that they should. Until you're doing your part, then I adjure you in the name of Jesus, you shouldn't be doing ministry anywhere else.

Then, **spend time with and date your kids.** Young kids, it's Candy Land, Chutes and Ladders. Then, after that, it's taking your kids to go carts. I dated my kids in high school when they were busy. Every Tuesday night, alternating two kids, alternating every Tuesday go carts, Chuck E Cheese, go to the mall, just do something with the kids.

You know, I've got time. I can probably give you a couple more of these.

Here are the other five. **Pray for and encourage your kids with words daily.** What are the magic words for encouraging your kids with words? If you've been here, you know what this is. It's the same thing that the father said to Jesus at the baptism and the transfiguration. "I love you and I'm proud of you. I love you and I'm proud of you," over and over again.

My mom and my dad came to see one of my son's basketball games and my mother says to no one in particular ... I was telling her how proud we were of our son. She said, "You know," to no one in particular, "You know, when our children were young, I don't think we told them often enough that we were proud of them." "Exactly! Exactly! Why didn't you do that?" This is all in my head. "Why didn't you do that?" I wanted to throw her down onto the bleachers, to be honest with you. "Why didn't you do that? I'm still trying to prove myself. I'm still driven, trying to figure out how to make you proud of me." Then, another thought occurred to me. "It's not too late. You could tell me now. You could tell me now."

I was 47 years of age. I can remember the place. I can see when it happened. I never heard it, but I wrote in father's birthday card because I took him to lunch on his birthday every year. I remember him reading the card in which I wrote, "I sure hope that you're proud of me." Without even looking up, he said, "Well, you know, I am." It was enough. It was enough just to acknowledge that he was proud of me. Encourage your kids with words daily.

Seven, **attend as many activities as you can.** I never missed a single children's activity. Now, I had a job that allowed me to do that. They remember that. They remember that. I remember my son saying, "Dad, I don't know what I want to do, but I do know this. I want a job that allows me to be at my kid's activities like you were at all of mine."

Eight, eat dinner together. You've heard or if you haven't heard, you're hearing now, there's so much research to support this. You can't do it every day but you can work around school activities.

Nine is **expose your kids to ministry.** When our kids were growing up, we picked the ministries in the church where we could involve them, like having missionaries stay in our home or delivering Thanksgiving dinners, things like that. I don't have time, but I'm going to tell you a little. We delivered

this Thanksgiving dinner one time and the place was cold. It was freezing so we went and got a space heater. My kids, I mean, their eyes are this big. They had no idea that people were actually living where they had to have a blanket wrapped around them. It made a big impact on them.

Then, **make your kids responsible for church**. When they're preteens and early teens, they'll go with you. Once they become teens, they don't want to go. They will not want to go. You can fight with them about it or you can put responsibility on them. My wife came up with an ingenious idea. It's worth sharing with you. She said, "That's fine if you don't want to go to church today but just so you know, that means that you can't go out next Saturday night." How many times do you think that they missed church? Once. They wanted to test mother to see if it was actually true or not. After that, they never missed church again. Going out, to them, that was something that was very important to them. It transferred the responsibility for their actions to them. That's fathering the heart.

The Big Idea: **Encouragement is the food of the heart, every heart is a hungry heart**. Our kids, their hearts are just so hungry, so hungry. You can watch any of the primetime TV shows that have anything to do with different crimes and things like that. You know, you can see this in the culture. It's the truth. Encouragement is the food of the heart and every heart is a hungry heart. God has established fathers to be the ones who encourage the hearts, not discourage the hearts, of the children as we pass along the things that will give them structure but also let them know that they have unconditional love. Yes, I love you and no, you can't have your own way.

Let us pray.

Our dearest father, Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the practical ideas that can be gleaned from that. We thank you for the principle of yes, I love you and no, you can't have your own way. We thank you for this perspective of this idea, this big idea, of encouraging the hearts of our kids. We pray that you would help each of us. Lord, it's not that hard to be a great dad. We just need to make sure that our kids are encouraged. Now, how they respond, of course, is a different thing. Father, I pray that no matter what stage of whether there are men here who have infant children or just had babies, so they're at the very beginning of it. There are dads here with kids who are adolescents and preteens and teens and adult children. It's never too late to be a great dad. I just pray that you'd help each of us to appropriate from this message and the discussions that follow, what it is that you would have us do to answer this call to be a great dad. You can always be a great dad. We thank you for this and ask this in the loving name of Jesus. Amen.