

Fathering and the Man in the Mirror

Character-building Struggle

Unedited Transcript

Pete Alwinson

Good morning guys. Good morning, good morning. Good to see you all here. This is the spiritual group in Orlando, right? Yeah, good to have you guys. Pat, it's good to see you, I know you. Welcome. Is anybody here for the first time at Man in the Mirror? Anybody here for the first time? Rick Hornbeck, I know it's not you. Anybody here? All right. If somebody comes in after we get started and you know they're here for the first time you could direct them over to the first timer's table where I will be after. It's good to have you here. We are continuing a series that Patrick started, and then Brett taught last week. I'm following up today, let's begin with a word of prayer and we'll get into it.

Father we thank you for your goodness. Thank you that we get to be your sons at the beginning of the 21st century here, following you and what it means to be a man and how the gospel unleashes us into biblical manhood. Thank you Father for the opportunity to be here and look into your word and also to talk about such an important subject as fatherhood. Lord we pray for these guys, pray for their day in advance and pray for this time. We pray that You would be with the one who speaks, forgive him his sins. We pray You'd use one who is finite to communicate your infinite truth. We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen

I tell you, fatherhood is one of my favorite topics. We were just talking, Rick Hornbeck and I, as we came in. Rick has a wonderful family, how many grand-babies do you have now? 5 grand-babies. His daughter had the latest, 9 pounds, almost 10 pounds. 10 pounds, can you believe that? Oh my goodness. Are kids great or what guys? Are kids great? I know. I know. I know, we have mixed questions about that, mixed responses as men. I have loved being a dad and I love being a grandfather. I have my grandkids call me chief from my boy scout days, I'm too insecure to be called grandpa so I said, "You've got to call me chief." It's cute that little Maggie says, "Hey chief." It's great. Kids are amazing, and they shock us and they challenge us.

I love the story, maybe it told it you before, the story of the farmer who was out helping the cow give birth to a calf. It was a difficult birth but he's helping. That's kind of a messy job I understand. He was standing, he looked over and his 4 or 5 year old boy was standing next to the fence watching the whole thing. The dad was saying, "Oh no, you've got to be kidding. Now I'm going to have to talk about the birds and the bees. I don't know, I'm not ready for this." After he helped give the delivery to the calf, the father cleans up, walks over to his son and said, "Well son, you've got any questions?" He said, "Just one. I want to know how fast that calf was going when it hit that cow." Some people will get that about 10:00, a little bit later.

Fatherhood is an amazing thing, and grandfatherhood is an amazing thing, isn't it guys? It's very ... Thank you. You knew I was going to guilt you into more of a response on that. It's powerful and it's very, very important as we talk about this subject. What we're going to be talking today is about character building

and the struggle in life. We've all made mistakes. Every one of us who has kids doesn't want our kids to make the same mistakes we make. We want to save them from making the mistakes we have made. We try to raise them in such a way that they won't do what we did a lot of times. We're going to talk about the character building struggle, how important it is to build strong kids, strong men, and to stay away from raising little boys who turn out to be weenies in a world that doesn't need any more weenies. That's not a biblical word.

But the reality ... You know what I'm talking about. How do we do that? How do we build kids without enabl- I just finished a book by Eric Greitens who is a retired Navy Seal. Great book, it's called *Resilience*. I believe he's a Christian. I'm not sure if he is, but I think he is. He's running for the governor of Missouri. Incredible book. I want to be a resilient man. You want to be resilient, don't you? Should we raise resilient kids? Does the Church of Jesus Christ need that? Absolutely. We're going to be talking about that, but there's 2 dangers that I need to talk about first let's talk about this.

There's 2 dangers whenever we talk about fatherhood. I was with a bunch of guys at a shooting range not too long ago. Scott McCurdy was there, some of you know Scott. When I left the range, I came back a couple days later and there was these 2 .38 shells sitting there. They're brand new and they're in great shape. This is awesome, somebody left some ammo, I need it. I picked them up, then I looked at the bottom and both of are already dimpled, which means they were what?

They were dry fired, they were duds. I don't know, but I guess they might be a little bit dangerous. Brother you're ready?

No? You ready? All right, there you go. That's a .38, it's probably a little dangerous. Okay, let me tell you the first danger when we talk about fatherhood, like that shell. He put it on a table. You don't want to put that in your pocket or hold it, it might go off. Here's a danger when we talk about fatherhood, whenever men get together to talk about fatherhood. The first danger is this, that we will underestimate the importance of this topic for all men of all ages. Did you hear that? It's a real danger, when we get together and talk about fatherhood, that some of you guys will say, "I'm passed that state. I'm not a father anymore. I'm a grandfather, but I'm not a father anymore. I'm passed that stage. It's no big deal."

Why is that a danger? It's a danger because gentlemen, we have a core identity and we have core roles. Our core identity is as sons of the most high God. Now that will never change, and you are sons of the most high God because of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. Once you accepted Christ as savior and Lord, you become His son and that never changes. Now you have core roles too. Your first core role is as a leader, and as a leader a subset under that is that you lead your wife, you try to lead your wife, and you try to lead your kids.

Fatherhood is something that we do, it's a part of our DNA. It's something that God has called us to do, at all stages, that we're also not only leaders, worker, providers and warriors. Those are our core roles in life. It's important to understand that that fatherhood role never leaves us, because even when we have raised our kids, and my 3 kids are raised, except Jessie the warrior princess is at college at UCF. I've got 2 boy and Jessie is in college right now. They're raised essentially, perfect kids, better than yours.

The reality is, I'm still a father even though they're outside the home. Now I'm a grandfather. It's going around, I could remove myself from all of those relationships if I want to. Do I want to? No. But it's important for me to stay involved in the life of my kids, it's important for you to stay involved in the life

of your kids, and your grandkids, and young men who were raised.... We've got a lot of young men here today, praise God for you. Some of you are still wiping the sleep out of your eye because your kids were up last night. Isn't that great? Fatherhood equals exhaustion. It's the way it is. It's why I tell my son, "Deal with it, it's life."

But we need older guys too, who are constantly looking at the younger guys and encouraging them. Danger number 1 when we talk about fatherhood is that somehow we'll think we're out of the picture and that we don't need what we're talking about here today. I hope you see that what I'm going to be talking about, about raising resilient kids is relevant to you at whatever stage you're in.

Danger number 2 in talking about fatherhood, we had a young man, I'm going to give you this one. That's a dud, it's a little dangerous. I don't know what you're going to do with it later. If you want to give them back to me you can. I'll give them to somebody else. The second danger though when we talk about fatherhood is what I call father guilt. It gets very quiet in the room. I don't think that there's anything more guilt inducing for us than talking about fatherhood and marriage. I guess the third thing would be pornography. If we bring those all up, let's talk about all of them today and raise the guilt level in this room to about 99%.

Fatherhood produces a great deal of guilt when we talk about it. Doesn't it guys? Why? Because all of us have made mistakes in fatherhood. I've got 2 slides I want to show you. The first one is, have you heard of the demotivation slides? Yeah, demotivation posters I love. The first one is on procrastination. Can we get ... Click around the- Oh there's a clicker and I've pressed the button. That's the mouse. There it is. All right, good. Have I ever told you guys how low tech I really am?

Procrastination, I love this, hard work often pays off after time but laziness pays off now. Got to love those demotivation posters. Some of us have procrastinated in really pouring in and building our kids and that leads to the next demotivation poster, regret. Regret, it hurts to admit when you've made a mistake but when they're big enough the pain only lasts a second. I love that, except it's not true when it comes to fatherhood, right? You make a big mistake in fatherhood and the pain doesn't go away, it sticks with you, and some of you know it, right? You know as I talk about fatherhood that some of you right are thinking, "This is awful, I want to get up and I want to walk out of here right now." That's why I say it's a danger when we talk about fatherhood among men because of father guilt in the room.

We need to deal and come to terms with our guilt when it comes to fatherhood or else we can't move on in living. We've all made mistakes in fatherhood. I've made mistakes. You've made mistakes. Some of us are divorced, we feel great shame for that fact. We're separated from our kids. I had a young man tell me the other, he goes, "I'm divorced but I've come to Christ. My kids live in Atlanta, I'm down here, I'm remarried. My ex-wife won't let me have anything to do with my kids. I feel more guilt than you, it can sink a battleship right now." A lot of guys are going through that, and I want to say to you, if you're dealing with fatherhood Jesus went to a cross to die for all sins. It included the sins of fatherhood, right?

It included the failures of fatherhood, and if we failed in fatherhood do we need to confess those sins guys? Absolutely we do. We need to confess those and we need to understand that Jesus' blood covers even our father sins. If you don't think he does, if you don't think that the cross of Christ can cover your failures as a father, then you have a narcissistic view of your own sin, and you have a Paganistic view of Jesus. "My sin is big it couldn't possibly be covered by Jesus." Oh really? The son of God incarnated in human flesh shed His blood for you and for me, of course His sacrifice is big enough for all of our failures.

My sin is never too great that he can't cover it. He loves, he loves to forgive us even of that. By the way I do believe that one of our ministries to other men who are not Christians yet is feeling around the rim of their life, finding out where they hurt, and lot of it it's the father issue, and offering forgiveness and a way to deal with the guilt and move ahead. Guys that's absolutely crucial for us in understanding as we talk about fatherhood that grace is what energizes us. By the way grace is amazing isn't it? When God forgives us of our sins, even our father sins. Grace of God energizes us to move back toward our kid, say, "I'm sorry, I failed you. I love you, I want to start a new day."

But as we talk about fatherhood we need to understand that some things, some sins are more difficult to undo, aren't they, in this life? If I back my truck over your mailbox and knock it down and drive away, I can come back and say, "I'm sorry I drove away, here's a mailbox." I put it in, I mix up the concrete. You pretty much will forgive me, except you're a guy, it might take a little longer. But that's not that big deal, I knocked down your mailbox but I came back. I'm putting up a new one, I'm moving on. But if you and I sinned against our kids, that's harder to repair, isn't it?

Guys we need to be real that some things don't get fixed in this life. That's why the preventative stuff is absolutely important and why we're talking about fatherhood. 2 dangers, but now let's talk about the good stuff. I love this. We're going to be talking about rai- You say you don't have much time left, I know. I've till what, 10:00 today Jim? 10:30, thank you. I want to talk with you guys in this series that we've been doing here about how do we walk our kids through life's struggles and difficulties. I've got 5 points, and you would expect that I'm an unrepentant Calvinist. We have 5 points, so I want to give you the 5 points of raising strong kids, or the 5 points of de-weenifying your kids. You probably don't want to talk about that, that's hard to even say.

First of all, how do we build strong kids of character. First of all I want us to understand that we need to understand fatherhood. Every man I believe needs to have a definition of manhood, but we also need to have a clear idea of what fathers do. A lot of times we don't have a clear idea of what fathers do. Let me read a text of scripture to you in Psalm 78.

"Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God."

This text tells us something that fathers do, did you pick it out? What does this text say that fathers do? Teach the children. They teach the children about God. They teach the children about God so that children can tell their children. See, we're in a covenant community that goes back a very long way. We go back a long way, and whose role, who's the first priest in the family? The dad. You, the fathers, were the ordained ministers in the families. That was our role. What fathers do, let me give you a quick definition of what fathers do. Fathers build lives. Did you catch that? Fathers build lives. God creates, earthly fathers procreate. God gives decrees to His people on how to live, earthly fathers take those decrees and develop their children. Fatherhood is building a life. Does that make sense to you?

One of the amazing things is that when we have been called to fatherhood, we have been called to building a life. How do mothers have something to do with that to? Yeah, I'm not saying moms don't do that, but who's at point? Who's responsible? Yeah we are. The buck stops with us. Now real quick, how do fathers build life? They do 3 things. In building the lives of their kids they do 3 things. I love this, it's action isn't it? They love their kids. How do they do it? They love them unconditionally. There are times when I love my kids and times when I don't like them very much. Have you ever felt that way about your kids? Yeah.

My first born was born telling me what to do. My second born was may more compliant, and then I had a daughter and I had to start all over again. I didn't know what I was doing. But the reality is that what a father does is he loves his kids unconditionally, right? You've got to love them because they're yours. That unconditional love is a powerful statement. The second thing we do as fathers is that we help them develop their identity, who you are. We love them unconditionally and then we help them understand who they are. "You're my son. You're my daughter." I used to tell my kids, I said, "Listen I wasn't an A student going through schools, but Alwinsons get As and Bs, that's what we get. If you get a C occasionally that's okay I can forgive you. This is what Alwinsons do. Did they always get As and Bs? No."

But I pointed to them and I said, "Your my sons, you're my daughter. You're an Alwinson. You're mine." Their identity is very clear. I told my boys when they were younger. I said, "You're not men yet. I'll tell you when you're a man. I'm going to develop you to be a man, and when I say you're a man you're a man, because you're an Alwinson." Fathers give identity.

Thirdly what fathers do is they develop their kids. They're building a life, right? In building a life they have to have love, they have to have an identity and they have be developed. You see they're raw material, they're not tabula rasas, blank slates, but they have to be developed, right? Who's at point doing that? By the way, how many of you have got a degree in college raising kids? No, none of us did. But that's how you build a life. See what happens is when you build a life by giving a child unconditional love you give them confidence that they can go out there and do things. Confidence. When you build their identity you give them clarity, "This is who I am." Most men go out into the world, I did, we're going out into the workplace so that we can find who were are and build our identity.

No, what you really want is to send your kids out there knowing who they are so they can make thirdly a contribution. Love, identity, development leads to confidence, clarity and a contribution out there. When we understand what fatherhood is we use every bit of the resources available to build strong and resilient kids. You understand fatherhood, then you will be able to understand that even the adversity that they face can be used to what? Strengthen their confidence as you tell them you love them, give them a clarity of their identity, and help build them to make a contribution out there.

We build strong and resilient kids when we first of all have a clear idea of what fatherhood is. Secondly we build strong and resilient kids when we build toughness into our kids, I love this one. Build toughness into your kids, how many of you would say that you tried to build toughness into your kids? Raise your hand. Yeah, yeah. This comes fairly natural for us, the Roman culture was a warrior culture. How did Rome begin to expand? It was a warrior culture, every young boy wanted to be a warrior. Did America have a strong martial culture when we got started? Yeah we did. Are we as tough as we used to be when America got started? No we're not. Is there a weenifying of America? Absolutely there is. We have lost a lot of the toughness, and a lot of the culture now says that toughness is not a good thing, we've got to be softer, we've got to be more feminine, and we have. You know what? We are developing a more feminine culture.

But if you want to build tough and resilient kids you're going to have to buck that trend, and some of us are going to have to get tougher as well. How do you build toughness in your kids from the very beginning? From the very beginning, when that baby is this big what do you do? Dads what do you do when that baby is this ... Not change diapers, that's not the right answer. What do you do when that baby's this big? You cry? You look in that eye, you love ... You hug that baby. You love that baby. You talk to that baby. You swaddle that baby. You love that baby, unconditionally.

When that baby gets big enough in diapers to start playing around on the ground and start rough housing a little bit what do you do? You start rough housing a little bit. You start rubbing your beard into his belly, that's what I started doing with my 2 boys. As soon as they were ready to go, I'd come home with 5:00 shadow and start rubbing in their ... My wife would go, "Pete! Pete! They're just little boys." I say, "You stay out of this." I said that really nice because we sleep in the same bed. But the reality is, is that it takes a man to develop a boy into a man. What about a little girl? When Jessie came along what did I do? When she got old enough I did the same thing. I didn't do it as much.

You remember Xena the warrior princess? Yeah when she came out I realized that's a great title, that I wanted my daughter who's beautiful, I wanted her to be tough. I started calling her Jessie the warrior princess. I was glad that she was raised with 2 older brothers because they gave her heck. But you know what? She needs to be tougher too. This weekend she's playing lacrosse, and hopefully the UCF lacrosse team will win this year, pray for her this weekend if you will.

Erwin McManus wrote the book Barbarian, I love it. Maybe some of you read it. In one chapter he says, "Not long ago Aaron, my son, asked me, 'Dad would you purposely put us in danger?' 'Yes,' I answered, 'of course.' Without blinking an eye his response was simply, 'That's what I thought, I was just making sure.'" Guys, God made you a little rougher for a reason. Do we need to control our temper? Absolutely, but has God given us the ability to build toughness into our kid? Absolutely, particularly when they come crying because something happened in the neighborhood.

That leads to the third point, you want to build resilience in your kids, understand fatherhood, build toughness. Third, teach theology. How many theologians do we have here today? Raise your hand, you're all a theologian. Theology is understanding the Bible and applying it to life. You're all a theologian. We as fathers get to be the major teachers in our kids lives. You can't delegate that to Sunday school or children's church. Grandfathers, we get to teach too, I can't wait. I can't wait. What do we teach them? We need to teach them the flow of redemptive history. You say, "What?" Yeah, can you teach creation? What happened after creation, what's the next thing that happened? The fall. What happened after the fall? God made a promise that he was going to redeem the world.

Was that promise fulfilled? Yeah, who came and fulfilled it? Jesus. Is that it? Is it over? No, Jesus is coming again. Can you teach that? If you can teach that you can teach your kids to understand real life, that God created this world but it's fallen, horribly fallen and there's so very, very bad people in this world. There's a whole lot of bad things that are happening. Honey, you are going to face some difficult things. Son, when Billy hit you with that baseball, you can sure that somebody else is going to do that again, because sin is sin and it hurts us all. But you know what, Jesus came to pay for that and Jesus is coming again. You know what, you can say this to them too. You can say, "We live between the fulfillment of what Jesus did and the fact that he's coming again. We live between the already and the not yet." You say that you'll be an amazing theologian.

The already and the not yet, "Daddy, what are you talking about?" "Jesus has come, and he's come to clean up the mess, but he hasn't fully cleaned it up yet, but he's coming back. It's going to get cleaned." Is it going to get cleaned up gentlemen? You teach theology to your kids and you give them that understanding of why the world is the way it is. Nobody else understands the world like Christians do. The Muslims don't, the Buddhists don't, the secularists don't. I just bought a book entitled, *Living the Secular Life*. They don't have the answer. We do. We can tell our kids why it's so bad, so when they come running to you with tears you can explain. Understand fatherhood, you're building a life and use even adversity, secondly build toughness, third teach theology.

Fourth, remember I have 5 points of raising resilient kids, always love but don't always ... Anybody anticipate this point? Always love but don't always give in? How about rescue? How about rescue? Give in is a good one too. Always love, let them sometimes feel the pain and sadness of life. When they're crying you say, "What do you do?" You say, "I know, it's awful." But don't try to make it like this a Pollyanna world where there's no pain gentlemen. Other people do that, we don't do that. Let them experience the results of their bad decisions, don't always try to make them feel better, because this is a broken world. Always love, always.

That leads to the last point about building resilient kids, follow the 3 Ps. The 3 Ps are, presence, process and prayer. Presence, process and prayer. How do we help kids when they're going through difficult times? Instead of turning them into little weenies that don't know how to deal with the toughness of life, we as fathers need to be there. We need to be there. Have your wives ever said to, "Honey when you're home you're not really here?" I know, mine did too, I hate that. She would start calling me Pastor Pete just to get my attention. "Pastor Pete," "Yeah. Uh what?" Because sometimes I wouldn't respond to just Pete, because I'm still at work, I'm still thinking. I confess that. Confession is good for the soul.

Be there with your kids. One of the best things you can do is be there, sit with them. If you are with them and you spend time with them on a regular basis, then the reality is that when they go through difficult times they will not hesitate to come running to you. Presence. Presence, be there as much as you can. Process. Process is a good psychological term. Help them process the stuff that's going on. How do we do that with our kids when they're going through difficult times? How do we help them process to growth? We ask them questions? "What happened? Honey what happened? What's going on?"

By the way, does this stop when they're little kids? No, middle school, right? Boys are really good communicators in middle school aren't they? Good night. They aren't, but questions. I think dads who make a big impact in the long run are guys that know how to ask questions, just ask a lot of questions. Ask questions ad nauseam. "What happened? Why?" Questions that elicit getting them to talk. "How do you feel about that? Man, that's what happened to you? Man that would drive me crazy."

Asking them questions, process. "What do you think you should do in this situation? What can you learn from this? How does Jesus want to build you and your character? What kind of person do you want to be because of what you learned here?" See as you process stuff then you can think of some of the Bible stories that you know, some of the Bible verses that you can bring them to so you can become the priest, their priest, the archbishop of their soul in a sense, and begin to develop them. Presence, process and prayer. Hug them. Can you fix everything? How much can you fix in your kid's life? Very little. How much do you control? That's a better question. Not much.

But you know what I can do? I can be there with them, I can help them process this, and then I can pray with them. I can say, "We need to pray, we need to bring this to Jesus because Jesus is the only one that

can fix this and help you and I grow through this time." Hug them, pray with them, show them how to take this stuff to God. Do we mess up gentlemen in fatherhood? Yes. Can we build resilient kids? Yes. Do you know how resilient they're going to be while they're still living with you? Generally not. Suburban kids will come home, even from college, and take, take, take, take, take. It's when you see them out there on their own that you see what they've become. Do we still need to confess father failure? Yeah.

I love the story of the guy who goes into the confessional box. He finds on one wall a fully equipped bar with Guinness on tap. The other wall is a dazzling array of the finest Cuban cigars. The priest comes in and he says, "Father forgive me it's been a very long time since I've been in confession but I must admit that the confessional box is much more inviting these days." The priest says, "Get out you're on my side."

This father thing ... Listen, Jesus died for our father failures, right? Confess it, get up, move on and do your best to build resilient kids. You're crucial. Fathering is the most important job that you can do. Grandfathering comes next. You are the archbishop of their souls, but you're not the redeemer of their souls. Jessie in 2015, I may have shared this, gave this to me on father's day, the high and holy day of the year. I opened it up, she gave me a hammer. I've got 3 hammers, I don't need more hammers. When I go to Home Depot I always want to buy a hammer. But etched in the side of it, "To daddy, thank you for helping me build my life." "To daddy, thank you for helping me build my life."

You're a father. You're in the role. You're the leader, but you're also a daddy. Be the father and be a daddy. Be tough when you need to and be warm, and you'll build lives, the most important thing you do. Let's pray. Father thank you for my friends. Thank you for fathers and grandfathers. Thank you that we're in this. Thank you that you've given the high and holy privilege of developing these precious lives that you've given us. We confess our father sins in advance, and yet are so thankful Jesus that You did everything necessary to make us men who could father and be daddies. We give you praise, commit our wives, our children, our grandchildren to you, that the next generations through them would come to know of your grace and mercy and glory. Use us to do that. We pray in Jesus' strong name. Amen.