

Fathering and the Man in the Mirror

Getting to the Heart of Discipline

Unedited Transcript

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Good morning. It is great to be with you guys this morning. Thanks for showing up. We're in this three week series on fathering and as you mention we've got the Dad in the Mirror book. David and Pat wrote this a few years back and it's got some great insights. We're going to talk a lot about, today, about some of the issues that the book brings up and talk about it in the same way that the book brings them up and maybe from a different perspective.

A lot of times to start these Bible studies out we give sort of a shout out to somebody that's using the video Bible study around the country and there's tons of guys doing that. You know, 120 of us here on a Friday morning but thousands of guys around the world are actually watching the Bible study. I want to do a little bit of a shout out and give you a little bit of ... Show you something. This is a group of guys, this 85 guys or so up in north Philadelphia that spent last weekend with. These are leaders from churches all over the southeastern Pennsylvania area around Philadelphia, pastors and leaders. We did a No Man Left Behind Conference on a Friday night and all day Saturday. These guys were excited about figuring a strategy to disciple all the men in their church.

I met a very interesting guy here named Pastor Lowell. Pastor Lowell told me about the little town that he lives in called Line Lexington, Pennsylvania. Line Lexington, Pennsylvania is famous among a very specific group of people for this place, it's called Susie's Lounge, which is a, I won't call it a gentleman's club because there's really no gentlemen there but it's a strip joint. It's a strip joint. This place is around the corner from his church. He has recognized that this place has become known by truckers and bikers as a place that you can go and then, I don't have it in the picture, but a couple of doors down is one of the those motels that rents rooms by the hour.

Pastor Lowell is a pastor at this Mennonite church. You've got a Mennonite church around the corner from a strip joint and an hourly motel. Instead of stepping back from that and sort of saying, they're evil and they're terrible and I'm not going to be engaged with them he is stepping into it and he's going after these guys. He has this fantastic ministry. One of the things that he does is he has Biker Sunday. I don't have the picture of it but he has another picture of this that I couldn't get to make a decent picture to show you but imagine that parking lot full of Harley's and big hogs and a bunch of bikers. He basically goes to Susie's and invites these guys up and makes a big deal out of inviting these guys so that they can develop relationships with Godly men. He's just stepping in there.

If you look to Pastor Lowell, except for the Harley shirt that he wore both days of the training, a different one each day, you would not know that this was a guy who was willing to step into that world. I love guys like Pastor Lowell. We need to pray for guys like this who are willing to sort of step into the fray and not shy back from guys that need the Gospel more than most. Pray for Pastor Lowell, pray for this

little Mennonite church around the corner from a strip joint that is not shrinking but is really shining the Gospel.

We're going to do our shout out to Pastor Lowell the Pat Morley way, ready, 1, 2, 3 ... Oh my goodness. Let's try again. Are you ready? Are you ready this time? Are you sure? You guys have got to wake up. Here we go, 1, 2, 3 ... Hooah! All right, way to go guys, thank you.

We are in this series on fathering and the Man in the Mirror. Pat last week sort of did a broad brushstroke on bringing encouragement to your kids. I gave you those 10 practical things. I'm going to talk today about discipline. It's not a fun thing to talk about but if you're going to have a series on fathering you can't ignore when you're doing a lesson on fathering on your son's 19th birthday. My son Jackson turns 19 today and he'll watch this video in a week or two and he'll see me saying, happy birthday, Jackson. I'm very proud of both my kids.

My kids are very different from each other. My daughter came out with a martini in one hand and a cigarette in the other. The first words that were spoken when my daughter was born was, well, we know who the father is this one is because she looks just like me, poor kid. She's 21 years old now. She's a senior in college. She was an incredible challenge growing up especially when she was little. Most girls go through like their teenage angst, my daughter went through all of that in the first five years of her life. All the defiance, all the crazy stuff. She was willful and she was defiant.

This is my daughter right here, she's maybe two and a half years old, maybe three and we're in a parking lot and she decides that she's going to run away from me in the parking lot. Anybody have your little kids run away from you in a parking lot? She decides she's going to run away from me in a parking lot but she's not just going to run away from me, she's going to do it in such a way that she consistently stays about three inches out of my reach laughing hysterically at me as I'm chasing her thinking, if I catch her I'm going to throw her in front of the next car I see. I was just so incensed. Of course, she's gathering a crowd as she's running around laughing and I'm chasing her around the parking lot afraid that she's going to run out in front of a car. That's Cassidy. Willful and right ... I call her the unstoppable force.

My son, he's probably, because of his older sister, he's the opposite. He's passively defiant. He's stubborn. Everything around him can be going nuts and he'll just be sitting there like an oasis of peace. One time my son was watching cartoons. He was probably three or four years old and my daughter came in the room and just totally wiped out and banged her head on the coffee table. She's screaming. If you looked at my son you would not have known that anything happened. This puddle of a screaming girl is on the ground and he's just watching the cartoons eating his cereal like nothing happened. That's my son.

He's withdraws when you're trying to discipline. He withdraws. He just sort of puts up the front, goes away and so him, I have to pursue. I call him the immovable object. My kids are the unstoppable force and the immovable object. Can you imagine these two together growing up and the conflict we had? Then, for us, as parents as we're trying to discipline these kids and the hardest thing is is that you cannot discipline an unstoppable force the same way that you discipline an immovable object because they're not motivated by the same things. That was a huge challenge for us as we were trying to raise these little evil creatures, these fallen, wicked creatures. Anybody that doesn't think that there's natural sin has never had a child, I mean seriously. Right?

How do you discipline these children? How do you discipline these creatures? How do you speak into their life in a way that points them in the right direction without ... You can't just let them run wild but at the same time you don't want to crush their spirit. That's what we're going to talk about today. Let's look at what we're going to talk about. We're going to talk about getting to the heart of discipline, getting to the heart of discipline and we're going to talk about three things. We're going to talk about the purpose of discipline, the focus of discipline and the practice of discipline. The purpose of discipline, the focus of discipline and the practice of discipline.

Today, I know sometimes we read from a different version of the Bible than you might have so what we've done today is on the back of your sheet we actually have the scriptures for today. We're going to try this out. Let us know if you like this and this will be on the download on the video online as well. We're going to look at Hebrews 12, verses 3 to 17. If you turn your papers over or if you have your iPhone or iPad or Bible, actual paper Bible, pretty amazing technology, let's read Hebrews 12:3-17. Then, we'll pray and we'll jump into this.

“Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you may not grow weary or faint hearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. Have you forgetting the exhortation that addresses you as sons, my son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.

“It is for discipline that you have endure. God is treating you as sons for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you were left without discipline in which all have participated then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this we have had Earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the father or spirits than live for they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, this is our Earthly fathers, but he disciplines us for our good that we may share his Holiness.

“For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone and for the Holiness of that which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the Grace of God that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble and by it many become defiled. That no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know, that afterward when he desired to inherit the blessing he was rejected for he found no chance to repeat though he sought it with tears.”

Let's pray and commit this morning to the Lord. Father, when we read a passage like this we see that you discipline us, that you, as our Heavenly Father, give us a pattern to follow, a picture of what it means for a father who loves his sons so much that he won't allow them to stay in a place of sin and separation from you. Lord, we pray as we look at this idea of how do we discipline our kids, how do we provide them with the right structures, the right guidance Lord, that we would look not to our own Earthly wisdom, Father, but we would look to the way that you example for us what it means to be a loving father who is eternity minded. Lord, we just commit this morning to you and ask that you would speak to us. Lord, send your Holy Spirit into this room, into our minds and hearts and help us understand your word and what you would have for us, Lord. In Jesus name, Amen.

We're going to talk about discipline and then this passage isn't really that much about Earthly fathers, it's really about God our Father. Why would we use a passage like this? Well, because God is the perfect pattern. He's the pattern that we want to follow. He's the perfect father and so looking at a passage like this helps us to sort of see what discipline will look like. Now, a quick word. As I look around the room I realize that there are, Proverbs says gray hair is a crown of splendor and there's a fair number of crowns of splendor in the room. Okay? These things that we're talking about don't just have to do with our children, they also have to do with your grandchildren, they also have to do ... I mean, a lot of these topics will pertain to even how you treat people that you're in a discipleship relationship, how you treat younger men in the church, how you treat employees even, if you have employees that work for you. A lot of these concepts will translate into that.

Don't feel like, oh man, my kids are out of the house. I'm done. Even more than that, I don't want you to feel like oh man, I completely screwed this up. I'm listening to this and I didn't do this right. That's okay. God is the God of second chances and he redeems and he reconciles. Maybe we'll talk about that a little bit more at the end about how you deal with when you don't think that you've done what you needed to do, how do you do that going forward? One way is you fix it on your grandkids. We all know what grandkids are good for, right? You spoil them rotten and then you send them back. That's the greatest thing. Really, you even want to, with your grandkids, give them that picture of what it means to live a life that is well ordered, that is disciplined.

Let's talk about the purpose of discipline, the purpose of discipline. If we look at this passage I want to highlight a few verses here. If you look at verse 8 he says, "If you are left without discipline, in which you all have participated then you are illegitimate children and not sons." One of the purposes of discipline is to give our kids identity. When we don't discipline our kids we're saying you're not legitimate, I don't care enough about you, you're not really blood of my blood. You're just somebody that I don't care about. This is sort of like, if God left us alone to our own devices to destroy ourselves that's not love. Instead, God doesn't do that. God provides us discipline, this passage says, so that we recognize that we're not illegitimate sons, we are legitimate sons. We are sons of God.

If you go down to verse 11, then, it says, "For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." The second purpose of discipline is to provide that peaceful fruit of righteousness. The point here is not righteousness, righteousness is a point but notice that a righteous life is a peaceful life. When we provide discipline to our kids what we're doing is we're providing ... It says it's painful in the moment but in the long run it provides peaceful fruit. In a world that our kids are in, that we're in and where everything seems to be tumultuous, discipline brings structure that provides peaceful fruit. The peaceful fruit of righteousness. Peace is another thing that is another purpose of discipline.

The third thing is, if you go down one more verse, "Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed." It's strange, you may not think about this, but discipline brings healing. Godly discipline, Godly discipline, isn't about smacking somebody into place, it's about giving our children a sense of legitimacy, of identity, it's giving our children a sense of peace and it's giving our children healing.

I remember when I was a little, little boy. I was probably four years old and we lived in Annandale, Virginia. I thought, I wonder if I can hit a moving object with something that I throw. I picked up a rock and waited for the next car to drive by. I mean, I was 4, it seemed like a legitimate exercise. I'm 4, it

wasn't a boulder, it was a pebble. I took a pebble and I threw it and I hit the car and I was jubilant until the car stopped. A young man from down the street got out of his car and yelled at me for a couple of seconds, I don't know, an hour, it seemed like. It was probably a couple of seconds and then he drove off. In my heart I was devastated. It had not occurred to me until I had thrown the rock and hit the car that I would be damaging anything. My motives were primarily, they may not have been pure, but I wasn't trying to damage anything. I just thought it would be cool to see if I could hit a car with a rock. I'm like 4.

A few minutes later my mom called me in the house and she sat me up on the counter and she said that dreaded sentence, is there something that you would like to tell me? You ever had that? The wickedness of my heart grabbed a hold of me and it would not allow me to admit to my mother what I had done. I need you to know, my mother did not say, do you have something that you want to tell me? I honestly knew in that moment that I was not in trouble. I knew that she just wanted to talk to me about it but I could not admit that I had done anything wrong. I just couldn't do it. This is the fallen nature that our kids have, that we all have. I resisted. I got angry and then I started crying. Can you see how real this memory is for me? That was a long time ago. It was probably about 45 years ago.

I got angrier and angrier and sadder and terrified and all of this horrible, negative emotion came and then finally my mom said, if you just tell me what happened you'll feel better. I went, I threw a rock and I hit a car. I didn't mean to hurt anything. She said, I know. Peace came and healing of a heart that was so resistant and bitter about such a little thing came to this little 4-year-old heart. Now, my mother could have just let it go. The guy yelled at me. Natural consequences, right? I didn't break a window. It was a little pebble. It may not even have made much of a mark, if any mark, on the car. My mom loved me enough that she didn't let me sit in that sin. She didn't let me sit in that experience. She didn't let me keep that experience in my heart. She knew that if she talked to me about it it would bring healing to my heart.

Now, what if she hadn't? Well, I mean, the guy yelled at me for 10 seconds and I hit a car with a rock. I might have tried a bigger rock next time. I might have tried a faster car next time. Who knows what would have happened, if in my little 4-year-old mind I had said, you know what, the consequences of that weren't really all that terrible. The guy yelled at me for a second and then he drove away. I totally got away with it. My mom providing discipline in that situation knew that I needed to be confronted and she made sure that I knew that I was her son. She made sure that she brought peace into my heart when I was all roiled up and she brought healing into the situation.

This is what discipline is supposed to look like, the purpose of discipline, this is what it's supposed to look like. Let me show you something. How do you figure out what discipline is? There's sort of three things, three ways, that we can look at the way that we discipline or disciple our kids. You notice the words have a lot of similar roots to them? The first one is license. License is like letting your kids do whatever they want. My kids, they need to figure things out for themselves. I don't want to be one of those parents that's always yelling at my kids and bringing them down. My dad yelled at me all the time. I'm not going to yell at my kids, I'll hear guys say. They give license and a lot of times license, sometimes license is given with good intentions. Often times, frankly, I think license is just lazy fathering or absent fathering. You're kids, without the external controls, they have a license to do whatever they want.

Proverbs 19:18 says, "Discipline your son. Discipline your son for there is hope. Do not set your heart on putting him to death." That sounds kind of strong, right? This is what license leads to. License leads to children deciding on their own what's right and wrong. License allows natural consequences to be the

only teacher. Natural consequences, frankly, our hearts are corrupt enough that natural consequences are not enough for most of us to make us good people. License literally leads your children to death, just letting them do whatever they want. You think about that, of course I'm not going to let my kids do whatever they want. We know this to be true.

The other way we can go, however, is legalism. Ephesians 6:4 says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Why is Paul saying this? Because sometimes we, as dads, can provide such strictness, such intense structure with no flexibility, with no ability for a child to learn from mistakes, with no ability to color outside the lines a little bit that we create these sort of robotic kids who always stay within the lines. The problem is that when you give your kids license you create brats and when you give your kids legalism you create rebels.

That a child in a situation with license will learn that he can do whatever he wants and given enough license eventually will not respond to any structure, to any restriction and turns into those kids that you all hate to see in the grocery store, right? The other side of this is to provide such restriction that a kid just eventually, if he has any strength of character at all, will just tell you where to stick it and walk away. Some of you have kids on either side of this spectrum.

What's the alternative to that? The alternative to that is Grace. The alternative to that is Grace. Pat said it last week, I think it's a Jack Miller quote, "yes, I love you and no you can't have your way." Love without any structure is sort of license and structure without any love is legalism and we want to bring both of those things to bear. Yes, I love you and no, you can't have your way.

I love the illustration that Pat uses of a little 3-year-old who goes to the beach for the first time. He gets out of the car and he stands on the beach and he looks and there's this beautiful ocean in front of him that he's never seen, an ocean, except in pictures before. He runs for the ocean. The thing is that the father understands things like the fact that the kid can't swim in riptides. As the child runs for the ocean the father does not just sit there and go, okay, well you know what, he's got to learn somehow. Natural consequences are going to solve this problem of my child rushing into something that they don't know if they're prepared for. He doesn't do that. He runs up behind the child. He also doesn't like forearm shiver to the center of the kids back and knock in the sand and say, I didn't tell you that you could go into the ocean, did I?

No, instead what he does is he runs up behind his child and he scoops him up and he protects him. The child looks at his dad and he says, oh father, dear father, thank you for saving me from certain doom. No! What does the kid do, he screams bloody murder, right? He wanted to go to the ocean but Grace in fathering means that you don't let your kids do things that will hurt them. You provide enough structure, enough restriction to keep them safe and enough freedom that they can learn and grow and become who God made them to be.

Grace is the intersection here of license and legalism. It's the alternative to both that gives us a better way of fathering our kids, a better way of providing discipline in their lives. This leads us to the focus of discipline. The focus of discipline has to be your child's heart. The focus of discipline is your child's heart. The focus of discipline is not your child's behavior, it's their heart. You look at what we talk about in Hebrews 12, things like identity and peace and healing. These are all things that relate to your child's heart.

If you look at the verses that we talked about, Ephesians 6:4 and also Colossians 3:21 where he says, "Father do not provoke your children," or I think in the NIV it says, "Exasperate your children." Why are two of the main things that Paul says to fathers, "Do not provoke your children to anger," "Do not exasperate your children." - isn't that interesting that those are the things that Paul says. Those are heart issues. When Paul's talking to fathers and he says don't provoke your children to anger, don't discourage your children in Colossians 3:21, he's talking about their heart.

I know there's lots of proverbs about spare the rod and spoil the child and stuff like that but spare the rod isn't about hitting your kids. Spare the rod is about providing the right structure and not letting your kids go to their destruction. It's about paying attention. Paul takes that to the next level and says don't just pay attention to your kid's behavior but pay attention to their hearts. Discipline is focused on the heart. Here's a couple of things to think about, discipline should be Grace, focused on Grace and not focused on performance. Focused on Grace, not focused on performance. Discipline should be focused on the heart, not on the appearance.

I can't tell you the number of times that I've heard a parent say, don't make me look bad. Maybe not in those words but similar to that. I don't want to admit to the number of times that, at least in my heart, I said the same things about my kids. Don't make me look bad. There's a lot of times where we react to our children's behavior not based on whether the behavior is terrible or good, not based on what they're doing honors God or dishonors God but on how it makes us feel, how it makes us look. That's discipline based on performance and appearance. It's not discipline based on their heart, not discipline based on Grace.

Then the third thing I would say, is that discipline needs to be future minded vs. just trying to get to some kind of short term compliance. Future minded rather than short term compliance. I think this is really true on bigger issues. When I was in college we had Christmas break and so I was home. I was with my parents and I grew up in the church. My dad was an elder in the church. He was a Sunday school teacher. We were very, very involved in a large church in New England. My dad did way more things right than he did wrong. I had a great dad. I had a fantastic dad. I know some guys have deep father wounds. I have a few minor scabs here and there. That's it. My dad did a great job.

I'll never forget, I was probably 19 or 20 years old, probably about the age that my son is right now. My dad and I liked to go drive go carts. We were home over Christmas break. I was a couple of years into college and I wasn't having a crisis of faith I just didn't really believe anything. You know? I had grown up in the church and so I had my parent's faith, the faith that I had sort of, by osmosis, it sort of just rubbed off on me. I had gotten to college and I had a year of really trying to live that out and it really didn't work for me. My parent's faith didn't work for me in college. I withdrew from it and I was trying to figure things out. I knew I had to talk to my dad about it. I sat with my dad, we were at a go cart track and I thought well, there's nobody around if we end up screaming at each other at least it will be the two of us.

I said, Dad, before we get out of the car I need to tell you something. He said, all right. I said, it's about my faith. He said, okay. I said, I just need you to know that I'm pretty sure there's a God but I really don't think that he's involved in our lives personally and I know that's probably really got to be disappointing to you but I'm just not where you are and I don't think I believe the same things you believe anymore. Then, I'm waiting for the apologetics lecture, I'm waiting for the Bible verses to be spouted at me, I'm waiting for the ... I didn't know what to expect.

He went, okay. He said, I just want to say two things. One, I went through the exact same thing when I was your age. Two, I believe, with all my heart, that you are a child of God and he doesn't let his kids go so you can think that you believe whatever you believe but you're on a journey. Just stay on the journey and don't just sit where you are. Now, let's go get on the go carts so I can kick your butt. That was the lecture I got.

Think about that. I love you, you're my legitimate child. I went through this too. No ranker, no confrontation, peace. Right? Stay on this journey, I know your heart is hurting right now, I know you've been brought up believing something your whole life and now you're really questioning it but you're going to get through it. Healing. He could have gone bonkers on me. His dad would have gone bonkers on him. His dad was a missionary in China and a pastor and sort of brought up in that very strict way. He brought my dad up relatively strictly. In fact, my dad rebelled against the legalism of my grandfather and my grandfather came back and repented of that later in life and my dad and my grandfather developed a great bond late in life. That in itself is a great legacy.

When he was looking at me he was thinking about the future. He was not thinking about short term compliance, getting me to say that I believe the same things that he did in the short term so that he could feel better about himself and feel like a successful father. Instead, he was thinking for the future. What do I need to do with my son right now that has the best chance in the future of him having a relationship with God. He made that decision. Guys, we're confronted all the time with our kids and in my experience, more as they get older. When they're younger it's a whole different thing, right? It's like keeping them from killing themselves or making you want to kill them. I think that is sort of the overarching theme of little kid parenting.

As they get older and older we have to think more and more of the future of where their life is going and what do we need to do today that has the best chance of tomorrow helping them develop a deeper relationship with God. That's discipline. That's the structure that we need to provide. That should be the focus of our discipline.

That brings us to our Big Idea then, that **Godly discipline, Godly discipline is heart focused, grace based, and future minded. Godly discipline is heart focused, grace based and future minded.** The practice of discipline then, let me just give you a couple of quick things. One is that good discipline is equal parts Grace and truth. Good discipline is Grace and truth. Yeah, we need to provide Grace but we also need to let our kids know what's what. We need to not go to far one way or other. Secondly, making important things important. Don't make the unimportant things important. Make the important things important. Third, catch your kids doing the right thing. I ran a juvenile detention shelter for a year and a half and there were three juvenile detention shelters in our little group and the other two detention shelters have kids run away from them every other week, they had a kid run a way. In a year and a half we had one kid ran away and he ran away for an hour and then he came back because it was too dark outside.

Here's the difference. When I went to those shelters they were all about punishment and getting caught doing the wrong things and so their whole focus was getting away with things. They waited until the staff's back was turned and then they misbehaved so that they could get one over on the staff. But, our shelter was run differently. We were grace based. We rewarded good behavior and celebrated it and told the kids that they could keep doing better. Yes, we had consequences for negative behavior but they didn't change. They were consistent. There was an easy way to get your stuff back on the good side just by having positive behavior again. You know what our kids did? When we turned our backs on them they tapped us on the shoulder and said, hey look at this thing that I did when you weren't even looking.

Look at this good thing I did when you weren't even looking. They wanted us to catch them doing good things rather than avoid being caught doing bad things. Catch your kids doing good things, doing the right things.

Finally, think about how do you apply these concepts throughout the rest of your life as a boss or a mentor or a teacher or a small group leader? Think about how this might apply as a grandparent and remember this big idea that Godly discipline is heart focused, grace based and future minded. Let's pray.

Father, as we sit in this room Lord, we all have influence over other people, over our kids Lord, over younger guys that may look up to us, employees that we're responsible for Lord. Father, I just pray that you would help us in all of our relationships to be focused on Grace rather than on performance, on the heart rather than on appearances Lord. That you would help us to think not in the moment Lord but about the future about how can we help the people that we interact with move towards you, move towards a deeper relationship, Lord, with you so that we can bring you glory. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.