

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
FAMILY AND THE MAN IN THE MIRROR
A DAD THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

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Good Morning, Men. We are doing a three-week series on Family and The Man in the Mirror. The first week we talked about our role as son, the idea of being an honorable son. The big idea was that out of reverence for Jesus Christ, I will honor my mother and father. Then, for the second week, we talked about our role as husbands and the big idea was out of reverence for Jesus Christ, I will give myself. I will lay down my life for my wife.

This morning, we're going to do our role as father, or if you want, as grandfather, that's good, too, and we will be looking at Ephesians: Chapter 6, Verse 4. Once again, however, this is a subset of the verse in Ephesians: Chapter 5, Verse 21, which says, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." So, this will be the final piece of that this morning.

Next time we will start another three-week series called, God and the Man in the Mirror. So that will be what will follow on here.

There was a father who was reading a fathering book, and he was really convicted about some of the things that the book was saying. He set the book down and walked upstairs because there were some things he just had to say to his son. He was going up the stairs, and all he could hear was the sound of his son's drums playing behind the closed door of his bedroom. He walked up to the door, wrapped on the door, and he heard, "Yeh?" He said, "Son, it's your dad, have you got a minute?" He said, "Sure, Dad, I've always got a minute for you, come on in." So the father went in, sat down on the bed and said, "Son, there's something I've been meaning to tell you. I really think you play the drums great." He said, "Thanks, Dad, I appreciate that." So the father got up and walked out of the room and went back up the hall and got to the head of the stairs and realized he hadn't said exactly what was on his mind, so he turned around and knocked on the door and said, "Son, do you have another minute?" He said, "Like I said before, Dad, I always have time for you." So the father went in and sat on the bed, and he said, "Son, I wasn't able to tell you just a minute ago just exactly what I wanted to tell you, and what I wanted to say to you, son, is that, is that, that your mom and I really think you're great." The son said, "So, you and mom." He said, "That's right." He said, "Well, thanks, Dad, I really appreciate that." So the father got up and he walked out of the room, he walked back down the hallway and when he got to the head of the stairs he realized that he still hadn't said exactly what he was trying to get across. So he turned around. This time the son heard him before he knocked and said, "You don't have to knock, Dad, just come on in. Yeh, I have a minute." The father sat down on the bed and said, "Son, I haven't been able to tell you yet exactly what I wanted to tell you, so I want to try again. Son, what I really mean to say is that I love you very much, not your Mom and I, but I love you very much, and I'm very proud of all your accomplishments." He said, "Wow, thanks, Dad, that's really special." The father was feeling good and walked out, started up the hallway toward the stairs. Just then his son opened the door and said, "Hey, Dad, got a minute?" The father laughed and said, "Sure." The son said, "Dad, did you just get back from a seminar?"

Here's a story I adapted a little bit from David Jeremiah. We have three parenting projects going on at Man in the Mirror, and I hadn't really put it all together until this week. I am writing a book called *The Young Man in the Mirror*, a book for high school boys. David Delk and I are co-authoring a book called, *The Dad in the Mirror*, which is based upon the series we did here, The Twelve Tasks of an Effective Father, then we are watching a men's seminar called Dad's That Make A Difference. So, when I got to this topic for this series, I said, "Well, what I think I am going to do is just give you a preview of the Dad's That Make A Difference seminar." So the title of this talk this morning is A Dad That Makes A Difference, and we'll give you an overview of some of the ideas that will be in that seminar.

Please turn to Ephesians: Chapter 6, Verse 4. All three of these messages have been taken from consecutive passages here. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." I want to talk about this for a minute. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children." Other versions will say, "provoke them to wrath or provoke them to anger." In other words, don't bring them down. Instead, bring them up. Basically, the idea is that a dad can either bring his children down or bring them up, and if you bring them up, it says, "Instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." Bring them up of the Lord, in the training of the Lord, and the instruction of the Lord. Basically, these two ideas, I don't want to delve a lot on it, but the idea of training is just a total education of a child in a positive sense, including morals. Then the other word in the original language means something like an acceptance or even possibly a warning, do this, be what you can be, have your dream, all of that, be the kind of person you want to be, then here are some of the things you don't want to do. So, you see both sides of the coin in this idea here. I would say that probably the big idea then is that out of reverence for Jesus Christ, I will bring up my children of the Lord. I will bring them up to be of the Lord.

How do we do this? We do this by creating what we might call, what Rod Cooper calls, an open system home. There are open system homes and there are closed system homes. You probably, by intuition, can already begin to think about what these differences might be. Let's talk about a few of them. An open system home would have a lot of freedom, but clear boundaries. A closed system home though would stress rigid adherence to rules and regulations. An open system home would be the word "love;" a closed system home, the word "performance." So in one love undergirds everything and in another fulfilling requirements is the basis upon which you are approved. In an open system home, the word "grace." You've heard me say this before. You can raise your children under grace or law. So "grace" is an open system home and "law" would be a closed system home. You can raise your children under grace or law, but grace is better. If you raise your children under law, once they get old enough to move away from home, they probably aren't going to want to spend much time with you anymore. Then, the idea that an open system home is a home that brings up, and a closed system home brings down. An open system home is a home that's built around principles, so an open system father would tell his son, "Son, these are the kinds of friends that you ought to have. Son, this is what you ought to be doing with your time after school." Principle-centered. In a closed system, though, the father is focusing on the particulars. "I don't like that boy, you shouldn't hang out with that boy." The father might say, "You can't die your hair, you can't wear an earring, you can't do this, you can't do that." They're involved in the particulars, so the contrast would be that one father would not allow his son to bleach his hair, but he pays no attention to who he hangs out with after school, what he does with his time, and doesn't even know what he is studying in school because he's more interested in the rigid adherence to rules and seeing that his son performs. That's the closed system model. The open system model is very grace driven and the emphasis is on bringing up the child in the fear and admonition of the Lord or the instruction and training of the Lord. So that's kind of the big picture here.

What I want to do is to give you three gifts that you can give to your children. These three gifts are kind of the guts of the seminar that we're going to be doing that can help you to have an open system home. I know that many of you already do, and this is not meant to pile on guilt if you didn't get this done or to beat up anybody. It may be too late for you to go back, but then, as one of our leaders told me who reconciled with his father, his father abandoned him when he was six months old and he spent a total of 18 hours with him until a few years ago. His father passed away recently, but he said to me, "You know, the thing that I can take away from here is that nothing else that happened before this moment really matters. It's how you finish." So, as we talk about these ideas, remember it really doesn't matter how you got where you are now, good or bad, what really is important is what do you do with this message for those parts of it that Christ will speak to your heart. What do you do with it; it's how you finish.

So these three gifts are: protection, identity and confidence. We want to have an open system type of a house and that open system has three things. It offers our children protection, the gift of identity, and the gift of confidence.

First, the gift of protection. Protection from what? What do our kids need to be protected from? Evil pretty well covers it. What else? They need to be protected from themselves - folly is bound up in the heart of a child. What else? Physical harm? There's all kinds of violence and threats to their physical safety out there. What else? False principles. So, world view kinds of issues and wrong thinking? What else? Stewardship of their abilities and not finding out who they really are and what their capabilities are? They need protection from all kinds of things. I'll tell you what else they need protection from. They need protection from neglect, from the absence of the things that only a father can give them. That makes sense, doesn't it? So protection means a physically, emotionally and spiritually safe home. Give your children this gift of protection by creating a physically, emotionally and spiritually safe home. The goal is to bring your kids up as physically and emotionally secure children. What are some of the ways we can protect our children? What are some of the ways you can protect your children or you have protected your children? A prayer covering over your children - to pray for them on a regular basis. What are some other ways? Proper training, teaching them principles. What else? Communication. It's very interesting just the idea of spending the proper amounts of time with them.

I was talking with a man last week. He was the director of a seminar that I taught. He told me this story. He said that he was always a traveling man, and he was typically on the road 100 nights a year. One night he was sitting in a hotel room reading his Bible, he's a Christian, and he was thinking about his 18-year old daughter. He realized that he had not spent enough time holding her and he had not spent enough time reading to her. He kind of had this spiritual experience where he was tearful and repentant, and in a moment he picked up the phone and called his daughter. He said, "Honey, when I get home this weekend, I just can't believe what I've allowed to happen. When I get home, I'm going to hold you and I'm going to read to you." She said, "Dad, that sounds strange. Don't you think it's a little late for that?" As it turned out, this story has a happy ending because when the over enthusiasm went away, he did go back and he re-arranged his career, and his daughter has turned out to be a very outstanding young woman. Four years later she's just doing wonderfully well. She wasn't doing badly to begin with, but the point is that we have to protect our children by communicating with them, and you can't do that if you're not with them. You can't reach them, you can't hold them, and you can't talk to them if you're not with them.

What are some other ways we can protect our kids? Setting boundaries or perimeters beyond which they shouldn't go. What's the value of setting boundaries? Discipline, love, give them some freedom? It's interesting, all these things are exactly correct. The idea is that if the children know where the line is and the line is always in the same place, and if they're within the line, they have freedom, and if they step over the line, there is sure and certain discipline for that. There is tremendous freedom in having those boundaries because they know exactly what to expect if they go beyond the boundaries, and they also know that on this side there is freedom. They can do what they are allowed to do. What else? There is a wonderful ad campaign going out on the drugs thing. Ask questions, know where they are, be involved - again this is a piece of that communication thing.

John Trent had a woman tell him this story one day. This couple had a five-year old and a two-year old - both girls. The father had regularly taken the five-year old out on dates. When the little girl was in the terrible two's, the father took the two-year old girl on her first date. They went to a fast food restaurant, and as they sat down with their pancakes, the father thought he would make an investment in his two-year old daughter and so he said, "Jenny, I want you to know how much your mom and I love you. We've been praying for you for many years, and we're just so happy with the wonderful little girl that you're turning out to be. We just want you to know, and I want you to know that I appreciate you so much." So he picked up his fork to eat the pancake, and the little two-year old girl took her hand and put it over on top of her daddy's hand and said, "Longer, Daddy, longer." So the father told the little two-year old girl some initial things he appreciated about her, then went for his fork again, and the little girl repeated the request and said, "Longer, Daddy, longer." Again she said, "Longer, Daddy, longer" four times. A few days later the little two-year old ran up to her mother and said, "Mommy, I'm a special little girl. Daddy told me so just the other day." That's protection, that's protection. You can just think about all the ways that that will work out for good in the life of that family.

Based upon what we said, how well are your children protected? An open system gives our children a gift of protection. An open system also gives our children the gift of confidence. I am taking these out of order a little bit from what I had planned because I just want to spend a few minutes on this because we don't have time to do them all. Confidence to do what? Follow Christ in every situation by faith. Confidence means to have a sure sense of one's capabilities. What I've done, because there isn't enough time to make all three points in depth, just for fun I included a copy of an article on the back of today's questions, which I called "Leave a Legacy of Faith." There are ten ideas here that you can use to give your children a sense of confidence.

The third idea is that an open system gives our children the gift of identity. What does identity mean? Identity means a clear understanding of who they really are. So the goal is to bring up a child to understand that their true identity is found in Jesus Christ. How do we do this? We do this by unconditional love that affirms their worth as an image of God. Unconditional worth that affirms their worth as an image of God.

One of the things that I've been thinking about recently, not in particular to this but it sure fits here, is the problem that we have in the church, in Christianity, of an underdeveloped anthropology. What is anthropology? Anthropology is the study of the origins, nature and destiny of man. Origins - where did he come from? Was he created or did he evolve from a piece of slime? What is his nature? Is he basically good and occasionally does bad, or is he basically evil or wicked in his nature and redeemable. These are big issues. That is destiny. Does he hit bottom in the ground or does he go somewhere? In this idea of being good or bad, basically, most Christians that I talk to come to the conclusion that man is not so bad, but not so good. He's not so bad, he's not so good, he's not so bad. Christianity teaches us that that is not correct. What Christianity teaches is that we are radically depraved. We are exceedingly sinful. You watch the news, and all these people are doing weird, crazy things. That could be you, except for grace, and if you don't think so, you're wrong. We are radically depraved, but the Bible also teaches radical dignity, that we are images of God, created in the image of God, and so we are fallen, but we are images of God, and there is redemption through Jesus Christ. To help a child understand this, don't teach your children, oh you're not so bad, and don't teach them they're not so good, help them understand the full breath of their dignity as images of God, then help them to understand they're horrible little sinners. Then you're a savior.

A friend of mine, who is a banker here in town, was telling me this story yesterday. He goes to Costco every Saturday with his five-year old daughter. This day the little girl was being extremely bad, not just sort of bad but throwing tantrums and everything. As they walked out of Costco, there on the ground was a brand new, shiny penny. They both saw it at the same time, and the father bent down and picked it up. He could tell that his five-year old daughter really wanted the shiny penny. Her allowance is 20 cents a week so you can imagine how much it meant to her. But she knew she had been bad so she wasn't about to ask. And he knew she had been bad and he really didn't want to give it to her. After a minute or so he gave her the penny. She said, "Daddy, why would you give me that penny? I've been so bad today?" He said this, "Honey, I gave you that penny because I love you very much." Immediately his thoughts turned to the Lord. One question that little boys and girls need to know, that's on the mind of every little boy and girl, how could God love me when I'm so bad? Your children want to know the answer to this question, and if you teach them, "Oh, you're not so bad, or you're not so good," they will get it wrong. That's an underdeveloped anthropology. We need to teach them radical dignity and radical _____, and the way we bridge these two is to put our faith and find our identity in the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Out of reverence for Jesus Christ, let's bring up our children to be of the Lord by creating an open system home where they feel they can have a sense of protection and find their identity and gain their confidence, in Christ, through us.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, Lord, all men at some point want to be good dads, so, Father, I pray that if there is something that a dad here this morning needed to know, and there is some adjustment in his own thinking that needs to be made, Lord, I'm not asking you to change their behavior this morning, Lord, but change their hearts even as we don't necessarily just try to change the behavior of our children, but we really want to change their hearts. Lord, we are your children. We invite you now to change our hearts. Amen

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