

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
TASK #1 - AFFIRMATION
Patrick Morley
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I've had a terrific problem for the last couple of years. Kids have been cutting through my driveway as a shortcut. My house actually has access from two different roads, and the only way to get between these two roads, without going out toward the highway, is to cut through my yard. This has driven me absolutely looney because our dogs bark every time a kid rides his bike through our driveway. They not only bark, they go crazy. They're jumping up and down, cutting up the furniture, and the only way to get them to shut up is to give them a treat, and it's been driving me nuts.

So, I didn't know exactly what to do about this, but occasionally as I've seen a kid driving through there, I go out there and say, "You know this is a private driveway? Does it ever occur to you that you shouldn't be driving through here?" "Oh, I'm so sorry," and you see them two weeks later they're doing the same thing. I was perplexed, but all of this began to come into focus about three months ago when my neighbor's house caught on fire. To be a good neighbor, I went down to see what was going on. It was quite a way, and I had never met them before. They said, "We really appreciate you coming down. By the way, where do you live?" I was trying to explain where my house is. They couldn't quite understand so I kept giving them more and more information. Finally the guy said, "Oh, I know, you live in the cut-through house." I promptly said good-bye, and as I had this little black cloud over my head, sulked all the way home. I had to walk home. It was raining, and it seemed appropriate at the time.

I said to Patsy, "That's it. I'm not going to be known as the guy who owns the cut-through house, so I'm going to do something about this." She said, "No, I couldn't put a chain across the driveway at the neck height of the kids driving through on their bikes." So I decided that I would make up a little sign. I went to Miller Hardware store, and a couple of other places. The only signs they had are these big ones that say, "Keep Out" or "No Trespassing." I felt like to be a good neighbor I needed to soften it a little bit so I made up my own sign that read, "This is a private drive. I would appreciate it if you would not use this driveway as a cut through. Thank you. Owner." I put that up out in the driveway. No impact whatsoever! Kids kept riding through. One day I happened to be sitting in the backyard. The road runs alongside the backyard, and I heard two kids on bicycles. I ran around the house in the other direction and, sure enough, just in time to catch these two kids driving through my driveway. So I stopped them. I said, "Hey, stop you two kids. We need to talk." I said, "What are you doing? Can't you see that sign out there? This is a private driveway." It was two brothers and the older brother was the spokesman. The younger kid started crying, and now I really felt terrible. The older kid said, "Jason, you don't need to cry." I said, "That's right, Jason, you don't need to cry. We'll get this worked out." But I said to these two kids, "You do understand that this is a private driveway. You know enough to realize this does not look like a public road. This is concrete and flowers and bushes. It's next to a house. This is not a main road. You do understand that! Right?" "Oh, we thought that this was a normal way to cut through." I said, "Give me a break here. What do I look like?" I didn't say it quite that way, but I was thinking, "What do you think I am? How stupid do you think I am? Do you think I was never a kid? Do you think I don't know what it means to try to get over?" I said, "Why are you doing this? Didn't you see the sign?" "Well, yeh, we saw the sign, but my father says we have to be home by 5 o'clock, and the only way we can get home by 5 o'clock is to cut through your driveway." I said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa - wait just a minute. First of all, I don't care what time you get home, but second of all, all you have to do is drive up to Wymore Road. It would take you all of three extra minutes." He said, "No, no, it would take us 45 extra minutes to get home because we'd have to go up to Killarney Elementary School and around there." I said, "Look, stop right there. You're not thinking reasonably here. All you have to do is go up _____, then down Wymore. It would take you three extra minutes tops and that's if you're walking. But you've got bikes." They said, "OK," and they left.

The dogs are still barking everyday. About a week later, sure enough I catch these two kids again. You know what they said to me? "I talked to my mother about it, and my mother said that my father insists that we be home by 5 o'clock, and it's okay for us to ride through your yard, and if you have any questions, you

can call my mother. You can call her." I said, "Whoa, whoa - wrong answer, wrong answer." I said, "If your mother or father want to negotiate something with me....." I'm thinking okay, people who act like this these are the ones whose families would sue you for a million dollars, right? So I said, "Look, you are not coming through this driveway anymore. If your mommy or your daddy want to talk to me about it, you have them come see me, and we'll talk about this, but I'm not going to negotiate this with an 11 year old." I didn't say it quite as strongly as that, but that's the way I felt.

What kind of father would put his children in that situation? Do you see how much folly there is in the heart of a child? The child doesn't know how to be wise. You would expect his father to provide that kind of guidance.

This morning we're going to begin a series that's going to last 12 weeks. The title of the series is, "The Twelve Tasks of an Effective Father." What is the goal of the father? What is it that a father is trying to accomplish? You could say this in many ways, of course, but in one way what a father is trying to do is to prepare his child to lead a good life. You can say this in a thousand different ways, but essentially a father tries to prepare his child to lead a good life.

Now we have a number of men here who have grown children. Perhaps you have grandchildren. We have a number of men here who have no children at all. But these are life's principles so you can apply these. If you've blown it with your own kid, this is not meant in any way to create a lot of guilt for you, but this will give you some ideas about how you can be an effective grandfather perhaps. If you don't have kids, you probably will someday, and, if not, you're going to have friends who have kids so there will be something in this for everyone.

I'm not bragging because I understand what a simple man I am, but I do happen to have two kids who have turned out very well. We have co-opted the business idea before that your system is perfectly designed to produce the results you are getting. It's a business idea. We have co-opted that before for spiritual purposes, and we could also co-opt this for fathering that your system of fathering is perfectly designed to produce the results you are getting. So, if you don't like, or you need some additional ideas, on your system of fathering, then what I'm going to do over the next 12 weeks is share with you my system. Now you don't have to accept this system, but let me encourage you might want to adopt it or you may find some things you might want to adapt, or you might hear some things that trigger other ideas that you can innovate on your own.

Frankly, a lot of the ideas you are going to hear are ideas I've learned from you. For example, Lyle here taught my wife and I our first parenting class a long time ago. We won't even talk about how long ago that was. Others of you have also built into my life, so in some sense my system has been shaped by all of you as well. So that's the deal.

Here's the focusing question. Fathering, you could talk forever on this, but listen to this little sentence. This is the focusing question. Which lessons are so important for our children to learn before they leave home that if for any reason they should fail to learn these lessons we would have failed them as fathers? That's a pretty focusing question. So, let's get right into it.

The first lesson I want to talk to you about is the lesson of Affirmation. I want to begin at Proverbs: Chapter 19, Verse 3. It says, "A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord." Now turn over to Chapter 22, Verse 15. You've all heard the saying, "There's no fool like an old fool," right? It's true there is no fool like an old fool. "A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord." But how does an old fool get to be an old fool? Obviously, he had to start as a young fool, and had to be a young fool whose father did not build wisdom into his life. We see in Proverbs 22:15, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child."

What is the mega problem that we, as fathers, have to solve in our children? It's this idea that "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child." If you are trying to prepare your children to lead a good life, if you're trying to figure out what the lessons that if they don't get them by the time they leave, we have failed them.

The idea is that children are born with folly bound up in their hearts, and we're trying to make them wise. Am I connecting here?

Listen to this little thought. I'm trying to figure how to capture this. The problem with a child is that it is foolish, inexperienced, stupid, uncoordinated, selfish, pouty, mean-spirited, sulking, anti-social, negative, unruly, a little bully in diapers that will push you around and control your life if, you will let it, who must be tamed and taught everything from how to share it's toys to tying its shoelaces while giving the child the impression that you love it unconditionally and are utterly convinced that it is a special creation and God's gift to you, capable of achieving graces when, all things considered, the child is completely helpless, able to do nothing for itself, and were it not for the successful experiences of many courageous parents who went before you, a seemingly hopeless project to be abandoned as a lost cause. That is the longest sentence I've ever written. To be a father is to recognize how special this child is even now when his potential is unobservable to anyone except you, its mother and its grandparents. Successful fathering comes by driving out this folly and scripting the wisdom of your own values into the heart and mind of this child so that the day you're finally able to say, "you're ready," happily coincides with the child's departure. That's the deal!

What is the mega solution to this problem of folly? Turn with me, if you would, to Malachi: Chapter 4, Verse 6. I want us to look at the last verse of the Old Testament. We will begin at Verse 5. So the mega problem we're trying to solve as parents is that our children's hearts are bound up in folly, and we're trying to remove that, to develop them, to prepare them to lead a good life.

What is the mega solution to this problem? We see in Malachi: Chapter 4, Verse 5, "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." Or as said differently at the very last, "Otherwise I will bring a curse on the land." Now when you look around today, James 1: 27, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress..." In many ways we have become, by degrees, a nation of practical orphans and spiritual widows. It's not always that the man, the father, is not in the home. Sometimes he's in the home but kind of not really there. For all practical intents, his children are orphans anyway. The mega solution to this problem for us, as fathers, is to turn our hearts toward our children.

The first way we're going to talk about that this morning is in this area of affirmation. How does the father turn his heart toward his children? What are the things a man needs to do to turn his heart toward his kids? Let me ask you a question? Do you think it is more important for your children to know that you love them or to know what their boundaries are? Which do you think is more important for your children to know that you love them or to know what their boundaries are?

One of the men built into my life is a guy named Larry Crabb. My wife and I went to a parenting seminar when our children were small. I don't really remember anything else he said over the course of the weekend, but I do remember this one thing and that's pretty good if you can remember one thing. If a guy can remember one thing 20 years later that's pretty decent. He said this, "Our children need to know," and this is Lesson Number One, the big idea this morning. "Our children need to know, 'yes,' I love you, and, 'no,' you can't have your own way." That is huge. Much of my system as a father has been built around that idea. "Yes," I love you, and, "No," you can't have your own way.

Affirmation means "yes," I love you and, "no," you can't have your own way. Affirmation then really has two parts to it. One is this expression of love and the second is the idea of structure. Let's look at four possibilities on this. I was sketching this out this morning.

Practical Issues: Your child wants to negotiate the curfew. Every parent has curfews. I shouldn't say every parent has curfews; most parents have curfews. Or your young daughter wants to go on a sleepover to the beach. Or one of your children, say age 13, wants permission to watch an "R" rated movie. These are real, practical, everyday kinds of situations that parents encounter.

Let's take one of them. Let's say that one of these parents in the neighborhood wants to take all of the 13-year olds to see Hannibal. You haven't seen Hannibal yourself, but you know it is basically Silence of the

Lambs plus pulp fiction, and it is way beyond the sensitivity and sensibility of a 13-year old who is growing up in a Christian home, any home for that matter. So your 13-year old comes to you and asks you, "Dad, can I go see this movie with Mr. Thompson and his son?" You say, "I don't care what you do." There are men who father that way. Probably some of you had fathers like that. "I don't care what you do." What's the message? "No," I don't love you, and "yes," you can have your own way. That sounds rather radical, but let me suggest to you, what about the father who is not at home because he's working all the time and doesn't really know what his kids are doing? Is he really any different than that extreme example, "I don't care what you do?" Think about it. The father who is not really around for his kids and doesn't know what they are doing makes them into orphans just as much as the man who says, "I don't care what you do," because he's communicating, "no," I don't love you, because I'm not around, and "no," I don't care what you do because I'm not showing any interest in what you do. That's one problem.

Second scenario: The son or daughter asks if they can go see the movie and the father explodes in anger and says, "You're grounded for a week and not allowed to go off the property just for asking." What's the message? "No," I don't love you, and "no," you can't have your way. The first case creates an orphan out of the kid, but the second father creates a prison camp out of his household. We'd never be like that. What about the father of those two boys coming through my yard? What's his message? He's not around - "no," I don't love you. You have to be home by 5 o'clock. I don't care what that man says about his driveway. "No," you can't have your own way. He's overly strict. A father who is overly strict, and not around, is sending a message, "no," I don't love you, "no," you can't have your own way.

Third scenario: Son, because I want you to know that I love you, you can go to that movie. How many of us have done that? "Yes," I love you, "yes," you can have your own way. What happens? A lot of fathers feel that to be successful they need to be their kids' best friend. Exactly not that - that's not what our kids want. My kids said, "Dad, we don't want you to try to be our best friend. We want you to be our dad." My daughter called me on the phone one day and she said, "Dad, can I go to the beach this afternoon with so and so?" Then she whispered, "Dad, please say no." She's not looking for permission to do what she wants. She's looking for me to provide structure for her. So are all of our kids.

The fourth scenario: Now son, now daughter, you can't go but let me explain why. "Yes," I love you; "no," you can't have your own way, and I'm going to explain why. That's a happy home. Love, but not at the expense of structure; Structure, but not overly strict. Love and structure together "yes" I love you and "no" you can't have your own way is the way we can affirm our children, and it is a very important step to driving out the folly to preparing our kids.

One application for you to take away today, although there should be some application in what we have already talked about, is that we have talked here before in the context of marriage that your mate, if you have one, has what we call an emotional bank account. This is an account into which we make deposits and from which we make withdrawals. We make deposits of love and care and interest and concern and time and touch and words, etc. We also make withdrawals when we do the things that husbands always do. Each child also has an emotional bank account into which we make deposits and from which we make withdrawals. Two of the greatest deposits you can make into the emotional bank account of your children or your grandchildren are things that tell them "yes," I love you.

In my family, I was thinking about it this week, I have great parents. They are really neat people. In my home, and there is no perfect home, probably the error in my family was I knew my parents loved me, but I had too much say in what I did with my time. So, the tendency was, "yes," I love you, yet you can do what you want. Not to the extreme, but I remember calling my mom at 11 o'clock and telling her I wasn't going to be home until 2 o'clock. My curfew was 11. I would be able to negotiate that with her, you see? I was able to negotiate a lot of things with my parents, and I think that's why I ended up quitting high school in the middle of my senior year. I just kind of negotiated myself out of the house.

But my dad affirmed me, as a young man. My two most vivid memories were and I can remember riding in my dad's truck. He had a small air-conditioning company, sales and service and installation. I can remember my dad paying me \$1 an hour and letting me ride in that truck. My dad is not a man of many words, so we could ride around all day long and he might only say a few paragraphs in the course of the

whole day. But, I was with my dad. I can just remember riding down the road as a teenage boy, like 13 or 14 years old, and I can remember wanting to say, "That's my dad; I'm with my dad." It was so affirming that he would spend this time with me.

Oh, men, spend this time with your kids. The other thing that just really blew me away looking back on it now was that we lived on five acres, and my dad wanted to fence the property because we wanted to put horses on it. As money was scarce, my dad was doing the fencing. He enlisted us boys to use those manual post-hole diggers, and we dug every one of those post holes for those fence posts. I guess I was like a Tom Sawyer because as I was doing it I was thinking, "Wow, I get to help my dad. My dad lets me help him." I may be taking twice as long, but I knew that my dad loved me. The other thing is to be sure the other great deposit in the emotional bank account of your children is to be sure that they know that "no," you can't have your own way.

I can't help but wonder if the course of my life might have been a little different, I'm not complaining, you understand, but I am a high school dropout. I can't help but wonder if the course of my life might have been different if my parents had been a little stronger in saying, "I'm sorry, you can't have your own way." How about your kids?

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, thank you for allowing us to be fathers those of us who are. Lord, I pray that you would give each of us ideas here today on what we might do with our children and grandchildren to be more effective in making deposits into their lives. Lord, I thank you that the Bible has so much to say to us about being a good dad. Lord, I pray that in these weeks to come, also, that you'd really help us to glean the truth that you would have us take away in our own role as fathers and grandfathers. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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