

Task #4 - Create a Grace-Based Home
The 12 Tasks of an Effective Father

My daughter, whom I've mentioned before, purchased a small, white, fluffy, fufu-looking dog called a Bichon. My daughter had never had a child before and did not know, not only how to train up this little dog in the way it should go, nor did she know THAT she should train up this dog in the way it should go. So, this dog kind of grew up in this permissive parenting culture and is a little bit on the loud side. My daughter was dating a young man, and they would get together, and the little dog would be doing its crazy things. Finally, when the young man felt he knew my daughter well enough, he said, "You know, Jen, we need to talk." She said, "What, what do we need to talk about?" "About your puppy dog." He said, "Your dog has some issues. Your dog has issues."

You know, men, there are a lot of issues that we look around and we see adult people have. What are some of those issues, and why do they have them? You see, a lot of people, in fact, they may be at your table, for all I know, but I know there are many men here who have strange relationships with family members. In fact, almost all people have some kind of a strange relationship. There are men here who are in families where there are separations, divorces taking place, not good parenting going on. We see adults who have issues that cause them to walk away from the Lord. We see adults with work issues. They can't keep a job because they don't know how to share and get along with other children. We see adults who lack ambition in their work, and then we see others who have too much ambition. We see all manner of life problems, coping skills, all kinds of issues that adults have being immoral, being dishonest, all kinds of issues that adults have. These issues really are the result of not learning at a young age how to resolve conflict, how to get along with other people, how to play well with other people, how to share. While the issue is very complex, we could ask why is it that adults have these issues, and why is it they did not get these issues resolved as children?

One of the main reasons, though, is that they did not learn how to make wise choices. Why is that? Again, that is complex. No question about it. But there is a process of making wise choices that children need to learn if they are not going to have issues when they grow up. This is principally an issue of training.

My son recently went on a mission trip. One of the young men with him grew up in a poor home and didn't have a father figure. My son was telling me that this young man has issues. He's in college, but he has no concept of how to manage his finances. There are a number of issues in simple things like the area of hygiene, and he really just does not have a concept because he's never had the training. As a matter of fact, his family is poor, and they recently had either their electricity or telephone cut off, and yet his mom is driving a brand new Jeep Cherokee. So there are some issues there. These are issues of training.

I am going to come back to this little graph I put up a couple of weeks. Now there are choices. Basically, what kids are doing, if you can get this, you've really got a huge leg up on the whole process, but children, adults, too, children basically find out who they are by finding who they are not. In the process of growing up, children find out who they are by finding out who they are not. So they make these choices.

We've been talking here, we started out with Affirmation that our kids need to know yes, I love you, no, you can't have your own way, then we looked at Moral Development that there are things you ought and ought not do, and last week we looked at the idea of Discipline that we should not allow what God prohibits or what God's allowing, but, with that little moral framework, our kids go out and they start making choices. They make some choices right here, things they ought to do, and a good father, good parent affirms the child, and they make that part of their identity, part of who they are. Then they come out here and make some other choices that are really things they should not do, and they are chastened either properly, severely, whatever the case, and they make these bad choices. They make these bad choices, but they realize that is not who they are. So they jettison that; they do not try to annex that into part of their identity.

Then there is this area I talked about of that which is permissible; these oughts and ought nots, or as somebody suggested, things we should or should not do. These are moral choices. They're choices between right and wrong. But God has a vast array of decisions really that are not choices between right or wrong. They are choices between two things that are both right; right and right. They are what we call priority choices, and they fall in the area of that which is permissible. So our kids are also making choices out here about music, about hair, about friends, about movies, about vocation, about study, all kinds of decisions that are not choices between right or wrong. That would make it a moral decision. But they are choices between right and right; they are priority decisions.

Now, if it's true that a young person basically finds out who they are by finding out who they are not, it is incumbent upon the parent, the father, to create an environment, or a climate, a petridish ???, if you will, where this child can develop. The child will sometimes try out one of these things that's permissible out here, like this, sort of added to its identity. You know I tried to learn how to play the piano, but that's not for me. That was a decision they made. They really wanted to try playing the piano, and that didn't work, so they decided not to annex that into part of their identity. Instead they went out and played Little League baseball, and that was fantastic, and they began to learn some things about teamwork, about fair play, about integrity. They started adding to their identity. This is what they do. They just keep trying out different things, and some of them shouldn't be done, and some of them are really good, and some of them don't work out.

The father really has the responsibility to create an environment, what I'm going to call a Grace-Based Home. The father has the responsibility to create a Grace-Based Home to deal with this. This quote is from Dale Earnhardt, Jr., right after the death of his father, in an interview passed on to me from John Barbour. This was on television, ESPN or something like that. Somewhere in this interview he said, "Everything that happens from here on out for a long time, I'll always think, what would Dad do? What would his decision be on it?" Every kid needs a dad like that. Every kid needs a father like that. I don't know much about Dale Earnhardt, but I do remember seeing, this past week, a clip of his son winning a race and father and son embracing and the joy they shared in that together. You could see there was a bond between this father and this son.

What can a father do to give his son the greatest possibility of making the right choices? Look at Proverbs, Chapter 22, Verse 6; one verse, I want to cover three things about it. First, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it." First of all, we have a tremendous problem here because a lot of people have tried this verse and don't think it works. A lot of Christians have tried this verse and don't feel it really works. What does it mean, and how should we go about this?

There are basically two or three different reasons why this principle doesn't seem to work. One father reading this decides to run a very strict house. Another father reads this and comes to the exact same opposite conclusion. Oh, train him up and when he's older he won't depart from it, so he loosens up. He says he doesn't need to have a lot of rules because it's all going to work out anyway. You can see how people can read the same verse of Scripture, and based on what they bring to the Scripture before they read it, they come to whatever conclusion they want to come to.

Something has happened in our country for which I'm going to oversimplify by giving you three pictures. The problem is that we have age segregated our children away from adults. Here's how this looks. In the year 1900, you can picture in your mind, a Sunday afternoon extended family picnic with all the adults and all the children playing games together and eating corn on the cob. Everybody have that picture in your mind? There was a time when children basically worked in the home. They started at the age of five and six, this was 100 years ago, by doing chores, and they were economically-useful children. They were always involved in casual contact with adults who were modeling out values that they would then adopt. Now scroll forward to 1950. By 1950, work had been separated out of the home, father had been separated out of the home, and adolescence had been invented, I won't go into all the technical details here, but adolescence was an invention rather than a discovery, and it was determined that it would be better to take children and put them in compulsory education, which is a good idea certainly, but also to transfer the nurturing of children from family, from father, to paid professionals. So you saw the advent of, not only

schools, but a host of adult-sponsored, youth organizations like scouting and several others, and also the invention of youth ministry in the church where we segregate out children from their parents and pay someone to nurture and care and raise those children.

Now scroll forth to today, so you had the family, 100 years ago was the primary nurturing institution; 50 years ago, you had the primary nurturing institutions which were schools, church youth groups, and young peoples' organizations sponsored by adults, and those organizations, by in large, failed to capture the imagination of young people. Meanwhile, one of the things that happened was that parents began, since we no longer needed children economically, we moved from the economically useful child to the economically- useless child. One writer described children as an expensive luxury, and it can take over \$100,000 to actually raise a child. So a lot of people don't even sense the need for children anymore, and you did, in fact, see for a long time birth rates on the decline.

Without getting too technical here, in the year 2000, children have been given time and they've been given money so they are at leisure, and the institutions that are trying to nurture them are not effective for a variety of reasons, not attracted to the youth, and the family nurturers are not really available to the children, so where do the children turn for nurture? To that group of people who have a huge economic interest in keeping them in adolescence as long as possible and that is the media.

One writer, his name is Romanowsky, an academic at a college in the Midwest, and he's written a book and so forth, but in one of his tape lectures, he was speaking to 14-year olds. What's that about an eighth grader, something like that? He was speaking to a group of eighth graders, boys and girls, and he addresses the girls. He says, "Suppose a really cool 16-year old boy with a car invited you out on a date. What would you do?" (Giggles.) Then he says, "What would you do, what would you wear, what would you order on the menu, how would you know what to order on the menu, what would you do when later on when you're parked in the car and he slips his arm around you, and you know?" (More giggles.) Then he asked them, "Who would you go to for advice on what to do, your parents, a teacher, a youth pastor, your peers?" Romanowsky reports that virtually every one of these 14-year old girls said they would ask their peers for advice on what to do, none of whom had ever been out with a 16-year old with a car. Where did these 14-year old girls derive their ideas about what they would do on this date with the 16-year old boy? See movies. Several of the boys in the class also acknowledged that their idea of how to relate to a young girl had been derived from seeing movies they had watched.

So you've gone from the family, I'm oversimplifying this, to the church, to seeing movies. We have teen movies nurturing our young people today. We have some fathers who are overly strict, have a legalistic home so the kids don't want to be there because the temperature's too hot.

Our air-conditioning has been out this week; fortunately it's a little on the cool side, and in our house I have an indoor/outdoor thermometer. It was so hot in there this week, guess what I wanted to do? I wanted to get out of there. When we are overly strict with our children, and we have delegated their nurture to institutions that are not doing their job, and have unwittingly given them the money so they can be nurtured by an institution that we really don't want nurturing them anyway, we don't want them around, or they don't want to be around, and we give them the money to go to be nurtured in places we don't want them to be nurtured. You can see the complexity of this problem. It's a huge problem. I really don't have time to say this, but I'm going to say it anyway.

C.S. Lewis made the interesting observation that throughout history when you look at groups of opponents who are going at each other, he said, "When you look back into history, you realize that both groups were dealing with a very common set of assumptions, and that far from being against each other, they were more united with each other against those who went before and who will go after them." United by a huge, vast number of common assumptions.

We, today, men are raising our kids with a host of common assumptions that we're getting from the culture and not from the Bible. The Bible says, "Train up a child in the way it should go, and when he is old he will not part from it." The Bible basically tells us that this is a task that takes place between a father and a

child. The father is basically instructing the child, training the child, being with the child. That's how it happens, or doesn't happen.

Really, it's a huge idea to remember this that our children find out who they are by finding out who they are not, and if you are not there to help them in a Grace-Based Home, guess what? They are going to be sitting in here 20 years from now with the same kinds of problems that we have, trying to figure out what happened, where did it go wrong, why is this not working out?

So the idea then is to really create an environment where the child can see a model, and where the child is encouraged to experiment and take risks. When it fails, it's dealt with appropriately, if it's a moral choice that is consistent, as somebody suggested last week after the talk, it's the consistent application of fair and rules of justice, and when it's a wrong priority choice, it's a nurturing kind of responsibility, and all of this done in a real personal relationship with fathers.

What I'd like to do is give you a few suggestions, and you don't actually have to write these down because they're listed on the questions that you'll be getting later. Now what are some of the characteristics of a Grace-Based Home, and how can you develop that?

First of all, father has real personal relationships. Father has real personal relationships. Do you know why a kid will come to his father to talk over trying to make a good moral choice or talk over with father why he made a bad moral choice? You know why a daughter will come to father and ask father, "Should I do this thing that my friends are doing?" It's a priority choice; either way no matter what you decide to do, it's right, but she just doesn't know what to do? Why will a child come to father? What is it? Mom told her to come. Mom will tell a child to come to father and a child still will not come to father unless there is what? Trust and respect. There has to be a real, personal relationship. You have to invest something into the child long before the occasion of a conflict or a difficult choice comes up so there is some trust there, and the child will want to actually speak to father.

This is not the way to give a talk, but here it is. Everything we are talking about today, everything we are talking about this whole 12 weeks, and if you all want to remember one thing, it will be time. You have to do time with your kids. You want real relationships? You want kids that are not dysfunctional adults? Do you want kids who will not be breaking your heart, like some of us have kids that are breaking our hearts today as adults? You want a kid like that? The price of success is time. The price of failure is non time.

I don't know where I picked this up. I guess from my Dad and my Mom or something, but I did time with my kids. I never worked past 6 o'clock, and I didn't work weekends. I just didn't do that. I realize some of you feel like you may not have that option, that's okay. If you don't want to do the time, that is up to you, but you can be successful one place at the price of being a failure in another place. Every does exactly what they want to do, even the people you pay. Think about it, the people who work for you, they do exactly what they want to do. The idea is to how to figure out how to inspire them to do what they ought to do; what you think they need to do. You have to pay the price for this, and the price is time.

Secondly, father consistently enforces fair and flexible rules. We talked about that last week.

Third, father encourages children to risk and experiment. I love the story about the interview with the successful businessman and the young reporter. He said, "Well, Mr. Smith, you're one of the most successful businessmen in the community; you're really a leading citizen, how did you get to be that way?" He said, "Good judgment." He said, "Wow, how did you get good judgment?" "Bad judgment."

A child finds out who he is by finding out who he is not. There has to be some allowance, some flexibility, so a child can experiment and take risks. One of the main principles of managing a good investment portfolio is what? Most of the portfolio goes into safe investments, but you take some portion of that, 10 percent, or whatever it is depending upon market conditions, and you do what? You gamble. You risk it. In overly strict homes, kids never gamble, and what happens when they get away? They go wild; they go crazy, because they weren't allowed to take risks, they weren't allowed to experiment.

Fourth, father resolves conflicts quickly, fairly and honestly. In my family growing up, this is not a criticism, but there were four boys, and they would sometimes drive me nuts, my three younger brothers. They had the system down; they knew how to play it, so they would needle me and get me going, and then I would get angry and I'd hall off and slug them. Then they would start crying and run to Mom and Dad and Dad would pull out the belt. I would get whipped until I could barely walk, and the kids would be snickering in the background the whole time. Now that's not just, not fair, and I want to go on the record right now, I don't like it. You shouldn't like it either. Make sure you apply this consistently.

A father models what he wants to reproduce. Of course, to be a model you have to be around. At my fathers 70th birthday party, I read a long thing called "I Love My Dad." I just want to read a few paragraphs from this. It started out, "Dad, the way I think about you has changed so much over the years. When I was a little boy, I remember how perfect you were so big and strong, the family protector. Yet your voice was always so gently especially when you said Grace before meals.... You taught us boys the value and importance of hard work. It wasn't so much what you said, but what you did by your own example. Of course, you shared your values with us, but what gave your words power was how you lived. You demonstrated that hard, honest work will produce its own rewards, and that a good name is more important than riches.... You showed us how to treat a lady by the way you loved Mom. I honestly can't remember a single time when you raised your voice at us. Your partnership with her in all things set a pattern for my own marriage. Thanks for showing me the way... You made it possible for me to get the motor bike for my birthday, but by making me earn the first \$50, you made it possible for me to appreciate it in the way my friends couldn't understand." And so on it goes. Father modeled to me what he wanted me to become.

The final idea, Father is vulnerable about his own mistakes. My son, John, when he was a senior in high school said something that just kind of struck me wrong, so I started ragging on him. He and I were going somewhere, I don't even remember where we were going in the car, but it was about ten minutes before the car trip that I started ragging on him. I wasn't letting up, I was upset, I wanted to make my point, I was doing it in pride, but he was not just capitulating on it, he was coming back at me a little bit. I kept this up for about 20 minutes. We were now in the car riding through downtown Orlando on Interstate 4, and now my son has been reduced to tears. He said, "Dad, why are you doing this to me? Dad, why are you doing this to me?" So I had to go left or right, continue to be a jerk or you can humble yourself. Say son, "I am wrong. I made a mistake, and I am sorry." A father is vulnerable by his own mistakes.

What kind of home environment did you grow up in? What kind of home environment are you creating now?

Let us pray:

Father, this is sort of the operating system of fatherhood, that is the environment that we create, and although there are many things we need to teach our sons and daughters in particular, there are software programs, I suppose, we'd like to give them. But this is the operating system that we would have a Grace-Based Home. Lord, I just pray for each of us, that you will help us walk away from this message with a sense of the things we need to do, and perhaps, some things we need to stop doing. Amen.

/cjb