

Task #6 - A Heart for God
The 12 Tasks of an Effective Father

I have a couple of announcements I would like to make as we begin this morning. The first one is to mention that our new book, "Coming Back to God" is just out and we have some copies here this morning if you'd like to pick one up. I believe this is the most important book I have ever written, and I am going to tell you briefly why.

The other eight books I have written have all been written in the voice that I've done my homework, here's how it is, you can trust me. I've changed my voice in this book, though, because I wanted to write a book to men who may be believers, but many who are not, who perhaps have become a little jaded or cynical about Christian things. This basically assumes nothing. This is a proof, if you will, for the reasonableness of Christianity. It's an apologetic for Christianity using futility as the starting point. We talked about many of these themes in here. The book as you know, all of these books, come out of the overflow of what we're doing together here. This is a tremendous Evangelistic tool. I also believe that every Christian would find a great deal of comfort and satisfaction in reading it, too. Since it's a book for men, half of it is fiction. Several stories that I weave through the first half of each chapter are written in a fictional manner. The early reports are very favorable. I encourage you to take a look at that, buy it, read it for yourself, and then find someone who either doesn't know the Lord or prodigal or culture Christian and encourage them to take a look at it, "Coming Back to God."

Another announcement, the web cast of our Bible study, I don't know exactly what this means, but it's kind of fun, over a thousand have requested to receive the weekly e-mail reminder for the weekly study that we are doing here. I don't know how many of those will actually watch it, but that's a lot of folks, so after seven or eight weeks out there, it's very exciting to see the reception to what we're doing on the web cast.

We're going to be talking this morning on the 6th Task of an Effective Father, and then we're going to take a one-week break next week, and I am going to talk to you next week out of Second Chronicles, Chapter 15, if you want to look ahead. The title of the message will be, "The Secret of Long-term Success." That's next week, and then we'll go back to the Fathering series.

My son, John, had a coach/teacher who is one of those guys who speaks kind of gruffly and abruptly; never went to charm school, okay? My son who is a sensitive person, not an oversensitive person, but I think all men are sensitive. He took it that this coach/teacher didn't like him. One night they had an awards ceremony, and they were handing out certificates for all the boys on the team. The coach shook the hands of all the boys except that, my son, down at the end, got behind another boy and the coach didn't see him, so the coach did not shake my son's hand. Now, John comes home and says, "See Mom, I told you, he doesn't like me." Patsy, being a wise person, figured that the coach's intentions were far from what my son suspected they were, so she made an appointment and went in to see the coach. Of course, as you can imagine, when she unraveled the story, he was horrified, totally embarrassed, shocked by that, and for the next couple of weeks poured the charm on my son, John, and made him feel like a million bucks. He came home one day and said, "Mom, can you talk to the rest of my teachers, too?"

As I get a little older, I find that a lot of the judgments I made about my parents' intentions and the intentions of other adults have become more generous. I don't know if you've found that to be the case, but my perceptions tend to have become more generous toward them. Regarding my own family, my own growing up experience, one thing that has helped me a lot is four years ago I began a journal of my own childhood memories. I wanted to sort out what's fact and what's fiction. You know we kind of get on this track of thinking about our past, and a lot of times that perception is very different from reality. I wanted to sort this out for myself so I have created a very long journal of different things.

One of the things that surprised me when I did this journal, and I've been adding to it, I think I've had three major periods now in the four years when I've put blocks of memories in here. One thing that surprised me is how many great things have happened to me growing up. Frankly, since I left home in sort of a rush and went off and joined the Army, my perception was that my childhood had been a lot more difficult than it really was. Some great things happened to me. You have your own great things, too. For me, a few of the things, I remember flying with my dad on Ozark Airlines, and the stewardess giving us chewing gum. They called them stewardesses back then; gave us chewing gum when we got on the plane. My dad took me with him on a trip. I remember eating hot dogs at the band shell on a Saturday morning. All of us little kids would go get these hotdogs, and then we would walk around the outside of the band shell and get back in line and finish the hot dogs as we walked around the band shell. Great things like that.

Cub scouts, boy scouts, playing swamp box in the neighborhood, all over the neighborhood, Little League baseball, watching the Harlem Globetrotters on TV, and then going out in the front yard afterward and going berserk, swimming lessons at Fern Creek Pool, ice-cream trucks, chasing the ice-cream trucks at night and hitching a ride on the back. The Royal Castle opened, and you could get a hamburger for a dime and a root beer for a nickel. Fighting Nuny Seymour; this kid terrorized me when I was growing up. He was a couple of years older. He name was Nuny and his big brother's name was Bubba; you go figure it out. Nuny went on to have a pretty rough reputation. I think most of it was legend, but part of the legend was that he cut a guy up with a broken whiskey bottle and that he volunteered to do three tours of duty in Vietnam. He was a pretty tough, little wiry guy, but he used to pick on me mercilessly. I know this isn't Christian, but my dad told me, "You go out there and you fight Nuny Seymour, and you don't come back until the issue is settled." Do you know what? Little Nuny Seymour and little Pat Morley fought for what seemed like hours. We fought in our front yard, in the neighbor's yard next door, we ended up across the street rolling around in the grass and you know what? I couldn't beat that kid up. But, you know what else? He couldn't beat me up either. He never bothered me again after that. I thought that was just great. I was the king of my sixth grade class.

Amy Poteat, my first girlfriend, first kiss, sort of a kiss, two bodies touching each other at the point of the lips; no action other than that. The Pine Hills Boys Club, learning to play chess at the downtown Boy's Club when my mom would drop me off. For those of you from Orlando, Herb's foot-long hot dogs with the family, family vacations, JC Beach with my family crabbing off the bridge at New Smyrna with chicken necks, with my dad up on the lake over near Howey in the Hills where the bridge goes across Lake Harris, hanging lanterns somehow over the bridge and fishing. I'm not sure if I have that whole memory. It was fantastic. Collecting snakes, quail, bull frogs, raising chickens, Ricky Nelson, discovering music, discovering girls, first date, dancing at the recreation center, the twist and shout, winning the Spanish award in the ninth grade, the highlight of my academic career, Beetles, went crazy for music with The Doors, The Who and all that.

This is the extent of my sex education from my father. He said, "Son, dress left." The extent of my sex education from my mother was this. She had heard about a girl, I'm not going to give you her real name because she's probably still around somewhere, I'll call her Bonnie. It's pretty close to her real name. Apparently, my mother had heard all the rumors I had heard, too, that Bonnie was a girl who was doing it. My mother was very concerned about this. As we riding down the road one day and Mom said, "Pat, I've heard some stories about Bonnie." I said, "I know, Mom, I've heard those stories, too." She said, "You have?" I said, "Of course, Mom, it's all over the school." Then she took a little booklet she had picked up at the doctors' office or someplace like that and sort of slid it across the front seat of the car, and said, "Well, son, here's a little booklet I think you ought to read." And that was the extent of the sex education from my mother. Neither one of them ever said another word about it, but, anyway, it was great. I loved it.

It then transitioned into the pool hall, Burger King, riding around Steak and Shake Restaurant, going across the street, and lifting the hoods up on the cars and oohing and aahing over all the cars. Just the preoccupations; remember your preoccupations. Remember your preoccupations? Here were my preoccupations by the time I was really entrenched in high school: girls, sports, cars, music, friends and

beer. Right? Those are the things that were preoccupying my mind. But, behind all of those things and behind what your children are looking for, behind what all children are looking for, I wasn't really looking for sports and cars and so forth, what I was really looking for was acceptance and love, and I was looking for a sense of identity and purpose for my life.

Lacking that, a lot of times if you don't get these things, you often end up leaving home feeling like you've missed out on something. So, when I left home, these being my preoccupations, I really didn't have a relationship with God. When I left home, I left home alone. I didn't have a sense of identity and purpose, I didn't have a relationship with God, and when I was in the Army, I was not only alone, but I became extremely lonely, extremely lonely. Of all the great things that happened to me during the years of my childhood, none of them were great enough to overcome the sense of identity crisis, lack of love, loneliness and despair that came over me once I left home.

I ask you, men, what is the greatest thing that has ever happened to you? What is the single greatest thing that has ever happened to you? No doubt if you are a Christian, you would answer that the greatest thing that ever happened to me was to become a follower of Jesus Christ that I developed A Heart for God. If that's true, men, the follow-up question is what is the greatest thing we can do for our kids, our children? I remember very clearly one day sitting down and analytically thinking about this, thinking what is the single most important thing I can do for my children to give them the greatest likelihood of happiness, success, meaning and purpose in life. After I had filled up a page or two of notes, I crumpled it all up and threw it away. I said, "The single most important thing that I can do for my children is to help them develop A Heart for God." I'm not just talking that they would be saved, although that, too, but that they would actually come to enjoy spiritual things.

In our text today, Acts Chapter 13, Verse 22, we read a wonderful passage that kind of maps out the vision of what I am talking about. "After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' " David, a man after God's own heart.

I told you last week that Howard Hendricks has cited a statistic that says that, "All of your children, young people in Evangelical churches, of all our children, four out of five of them will leave the church by their senior year in high school." Let me give you another statistic. Jay Strack, another person who deals pretty much exclusively with youth, says that, "statistics show that 88% of our children will leave the church by the time they are seniors in high school." So, Hendricks' statistic is 8 out of 10, Jay Strack's statistic is 8.8 out of 10, and guess what the number one question, the number one concern on the minds of Christian parents, in a survey that was done not long ago? The number one concern of Christian parents is will my children stay true to the Christian faith? Isn't it ironic that the greatest concern the parents have is whether their children are going to stay true to the Christian faith, and they're not doing it. What an incredible disparity it is that the thing that will be the most precious thing to the heart of a Christian parent is the very thing that is not happening with their children.

What I'd like to suggest to you is that a focusing idea for this whole thing, and this is the big idea this morning, the number one focus of a father should be to help his children develop A Heart for God. The number one focus of a father should be to give his children A Heart for God. What I want us to look at this morning is how can a father give his children A Heart for God, and I am going to give you three things you can do, three practical things you can do, and three practical things you can have your children do. The idea here is how do you make this appealing to your children? How do you make the Christian story appealing, how do you make it plausible for them, and how do you make it clear?

Three things that you can do:

The first one is prayer. The first and most practical thing you can do for your children is to pray for them. Now prayer is so important that I am going to do an entire week on it, so I am just going to leave it there with you.

The second thing is to instruct your children; pray for them, instruction. If would you flip over with me to Psalm, Chapter 78, Verse 1. There is a model here and the same model is found in other parts of the scripture, but there is a model here for instructing our kids in the Christian story. We talked the last time we were together about the importance of making sure they have the right story, and that is the Christian story. You may want to write this down. Basically the Christian story is this: It's creation, fall, redemption, new creation. That's the Christian story; creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. In order for a child to understand how the little bits and pieces of their life fits into the Christian story, they need to have some sense of the creation story, the story of the fall, how redemption works, and how they can participate in that personally, and then the new creation, future glory, the new heavens, the new earth, where we're headed to so there is a hopefulness that comes out of this.

You see this outlined, much of it right here in Psalm 78. "Oh my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old, things you have heard and known..." Where did this knowledge come from, things we have heard and known? Things our fathers have told us. What will we do with this knowledge? Verse 4, "We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children."

Look at Verse 4, the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord. This is how we see God working in creation, through science, oh my gosh. Do we want our children to know about science? Of course, we want our children to know about science. God created science. Theologians would call this general revelation. It is how God reveals himself in nature or in creation. This verse tells us to teach our children about general revelation; the praiseworthy deeds of God. In the next verse, theologians would call special revelation. The special revelation of God is what? It is the Bible. The special revelation of God is the Bible. Look at the next verse here, "He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel..." This is God's word. So God reveals himself in creation, or in the world, if you will, and in his word, if you will. Through the world and the word God reveals himself, and we are instructed that we will not hide these things from children; we will tell the next generation about these praiseworthy deeds, and about the statutes and commands of God's word. So that's the instruction part of it.

I don't know about you, but my parents delegated all of this to other people. And I love my parents. You've heard me talk about how much I love my parents, but they just delegated all this to other people. I got up a little early this morning because I was a little troubled by this in trying to sort all of this out. Am I reading back into history something that isn't true? I might be, but I can't remember my parents being involved in my spiritual instruction. It was a huge mistake. It created a lot of problems; more heartache for them than me, and I broke their hearts. So, men, be involved in the instruction of your children.

The third practical thing you can do is to model your Christian faith before them. The reason I say that is because as you well know, your children will imitate you. That means that in your modeling you should have two goals: 1) That there would be one-to-one correlation between your public and private life; and 2) Because we know that won't happen, there ought to be honest humility to confess your faults before your kids.

One day when my daughter was 15 years old, we got into a little spat. When they're 15, you get into lots of little spats, right? Of course, that's all over by the time their 16, yeah right! We got into a little spat, and it got a little out of control. I, at that point, had a building behind our house where I had an office. I went out to the office, and I was really steamed; I was so angry. About 10 minutes later my daughter came out to make a photocopy, and I did something I am so ashamed of myself for doing. She walked in the door and for the first and only time I can remember, I decided to hurt my daughter on purpose. I said to her, "What are you doing? You're not welcome here." With that she broke down in tears sobbing and ran away. I said, "Oh, my God what have I done; what have I done?"

You know, men, that's the moment of truth. It's from that moment on that many men, because of their foolish pride, don't humble themselves and go make things right. That's one of the ways these four out of five kids end up not in the church anymore. So have the goal of having a one-to-one correlation between your life out there and what's really going on behind the closed doors of your own private castle. But, knowing that you're going to fail, have the humility to set it right. Moments later I rushed into the house and said, "Patsy, I've done a terrible thing. I can't believe what I've done." And, I told her what I had done. I said, "What do I need to do?" I felt so stupid at that point that I didn't know what to do. She told me what to do, and I did it, and we were able to move right past that terrible incident. I've never hurt my children before or since intentionally. It was such an incredibly gruesome experience.

Three very practical things that we can do for our children is to pray for them, make sure we instruct them, and that we model for them what we would like them to become. You've heard it said before, I'm sure, that we teach what we believe; we reproduce what we are.

And now, three practical things that you can have them do: The first and most practical thing you can have them do, not in terms of value just first on this list, is to make them go to church. Force them to go to church, if you must. Now, some of you have been forced to go to church, and some of you have tried to force your own kids to go to church, and you're thinking to yourself, ha, I finally caught him on something here that he is totally wrong on. You shouldn't force your children to go to church. Ha! I caught you; you're wrong thinking I'm wrong. Let me ask you this question? Do you think you should force your children to go to school if they don't want to go to school? Do you? Well, why would any of us ever think we shouldn't force our children then to go to church?

If you wanted to become a good golfer, and you said, "Well, I'm not going to practice golf. I'm just going to show up and play. I'm never going to do anything to practice. Then you went out and shot 120. Who are you going to be mad at? The golf course; the clubs. If someone wanted to play the piano very well they would never expect they could never practice the piano and become very good at it. It's the same way with Christianity. You can't be a good Christian if you don't work at it. You can be a Christian and a bad one, but you certainly can't be a good one without putting some real genuine effort into making it happen. Where does that happen? That happens at church. Listen, your kids, your children, this is one of the main places where they're going to develop Christian friends, hear about the Christian stories, be exposed to meaningful youth activities and hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If they're not in church where do you think they're going to get that? Hopefully, they'll get it from you, but if not reinforced anywhere else, you put them at great risk.

I am reading from "Devotions for Couples," page 204, if you have it at home. "A recent survey on a po.....on college students reveal that children raised in consistently Christian homes are more likely to keep the faith. The more regular their church attendance and the later in life doubts about their faith came the more persistent they remained in their beliefs." Those students who had abandoned their early religion cited, take a guess, hypocrisy, racism, dishonesty and parents who only attended church on special occasions and holidays. So, force them to be in church. That's one thing you can get them to do.

Secondly, missions and service. Both of my children have had dramatic experiences by teaching other students in Bible studies and going on Missions' trips to places like Mexico or some went to China one summer. Most young people in our culture just don't have an opportunity to feel the weight of the oppression of the sting of the lack of the Gospel. So, it's good to have them go out. Those of you who have been in churches where students come back from Missions' trips, you know for two weeks they are always changed kids. For two weeks. Right? Then they're back in the world again, and it begins to taper off a little bit. Missions' trips, or service projects, are fantastic ways as practical things you can give your children A Heart for God.

The final thing is devotions. There are two kinds of devotions. The first one is family devotions which we did three or four days a week for 15 minutes in the morning. I would try to come up with an interesting question or a quote to hook them, then read a Bible verse, then give them a principle, then an illustration or a story about it, then I'd ask them a question. All took ten minutes. Then we'd pray. Their prayers were very shallow in the beginning, so we'd start every morning to pray for one person. We'd ask them to pray

for some person in the community who was hurting. Everybody didn't need to know who it was. We'd break in the summer because sleep schedules change. Kids eyes glazed over almost every morning. I'd think to myself, what am I doing here? This is crazy. One day the woman who was disciplining my daughter with a bunch of other high school girls said to my wife one day, "I don't know what you all do in those devotions, but they must really be special, because I'll bring up something in our discipleship group and your daughter, Jen, would say that her Dad said this or said that. I said, "I can't believe it, because at that hour of the morning she looks like she is comatose.

The other thing is to encourage you kids to have their own private devotions. Those of you who have been around here for a while have heard this before, but I encourage you to bribe your kids to do family devotions. Here's the plan we used. We started this when they were at an age when they could appreciate deferred gratification. Patsy and I got together and told the kids, "If you will do a daily devotion, five minutes max, not allowed to go over five minutes, you can use anything you want, youth walk, Living Bible, --- Bible, whatever you want. But if you will do a five-minute devotion and you will do that 25 out of 30 days of the month, you get five days grace, we will buy you, that month, a CD of your choice." Kind of got a blank look. But then I said, "That's not all. If you will do 25 out of 30 days for 10 out of 12 months, we'll give you \$250 cash money." All of a sudden the eyes started bulging a little bit. "Gosh, Dad, really?" "Yeh, and that's not all. If you'll do 25 out of 30 days and you do it all 12 months, 12 out of 12 months, we'll give you a double bonus. We'll pay you \$500." By now my kids are very interested.

Kids are very interested in money. I am very interested in giving my children A Heart for God. Can we get together on this? The amount of money is not the important thing; just make it relevant for your own situation. We set it up on an honor system. We suggested they make up a little chart; put an "X" in on the time you do it, and if you miss a day, you can make it up, that's fine. My kids, in contrast to most of the kids at the Christian school where they grew up, my kids did daily devotions. One day they conspired on the annual renewal contract for this and they'd gotten together and conspired against me. When I asked if they wanted to go another year, and they said, "Dad, we've been talking, and you don't need to pay us; we're going to be doing this anyway."

The number one focus of a father should be to give his children A Heart for God. Great things they can have, but the greatest thing is A Heart for God.

Let us pray:

Father, each one of us has our own story of a father or mentor who gave us a heart for something. As we reflect back on our own lives, Lord, no doubt many of us wish that would have been A Heart for God. Lord, I pray that you'd help each of us to make those of us who still have the possibility of doing this that we would make the central focus of our fathering to give our children A Heart for God. Amen.

/cjb