

Task #8 - Mentoring
The 12 Tasks of an Effective Father

Good Morning, Men. It's great to be at a men's Bible Study isn't it? Hopefully, by now you have your Bibles open to Ephesians, Chapter 6, Verse 1. Go ahead and turn your chairs, if you have not already done that, and get yourself real comfortable. Everybody make that grindy sound all at once.

In the Bible it says that, "Mary, when the angels spoke to her, treasured up those words in her heart and pondered them." We all have heard things, something that someone has said to us that just really encouraged us deeply. We treasure them in our hearts, and we ponder them; we roll them over and over again. Some of these are very deep, serious things, and others kind of appeal to our ego a little bit.

Well, last week I had one that kind of appeals to my ego a little bit. When I was dating my wife, she thought she was going to be married to a motorcycle racer, a person who earned their living riding motorcycles. I was just getting started in the motorcycle-racing field, and it was my dream to someday have a factory ride. Well, that, of course, didn't work out; in fact, it didn't work out big time when I think about it. But last week, a friend of mine told me that his son, a senior in high school at a public high school in Seminole County, was in a shop class and just out of the clear blue, for no particular reason, the teacher, I definitely want to find out who it is, said, "The fastest guy I ever saw on a motorcycle was a guy named Pat Morley." I love that guy. (Lots of laughter) He obviously didn't get around much.

The only time my parents ever came to watch me race a motorcycle was one time here in Orlando, this was motor-cross racing, and I was real excited they were finally coming to watch their son. Since funds were limited, my motorcycle was one that I was always doing some repairs on as it was always breaking down for some reason or another. On this particular day, the one time my parents came, I went over a big jump and when I came down the handlebars gave way, slipped down, and so I lost control and fell down on the other side of the jump blind now to all the other riders behind me. As I am aware of this, I jumped up eager to get out of the way and turned around so I could see what was going on, and about that time a Botacho????, that's a brand name, was coming over the jump and hit me square in the middle of my helmet and I totaled the bike. (Laughter) Put a little nick in the helmet, too, by the way. The motorcycle and I got all mangled together and the next thing I know I am down on the ground. Since it was the first time my Mom and Dad had ever come to see me and are in the stands, I wanted to make sure they knew I was all right, so I leapt to my feet and started waving. When I looked down I saw blood over the place, and I passed out. The next thing I remember is waking up in a helicopter on the way to Florida Hospital. That was my parents' first encounter with my motorcycle racing.

It is interesting that that was the only time that Mom and Dad had ever come to see me. I can remember another young man who really was a better racer than me, and he and his dad would come to the races. They had a van, set up a little tent, had all the right equipment, and all the right tools. The father you could see was mentoring the son about all the things he needed to know. There were certain things you needed to know but could get along if you found out those things on your own, but you had a real advantage if you had someone there to mentor you and show you the way.

I've always been struck by that because, in my life, I take full responsibility for pushing my parents away and not letting them into my life. I take full responsibility for that. But a child who has a mentor will get a significantly different result than a child who does not have a mentor.

What I want to do this morning is take a look at the subject of mentoring. This will be the 8th Task that we've taken a look at. The reality is that I was a very angry young man. I am not going around looking angry. I'm going around looking happy, smiling and joking around. There were things that would trigger this angry. I was a very angry young man because I didn't have a mentor in my life. I was forced to discover things on my own that I could that other young men had someone investing those things into their lives. Mentor was an elderly advisor to Odysseus in the Greek epic tale, "The Odyssey," and that's where we get the term mentor. A mentor is basically a wise and faithful counselor. I have no problem with co-

opting a Greek idea for a spiritual purpose. Christianity has lived inside of cultures; you don't throw out cultures. So this is a very useful idea.

Now, we've looked at a number of different tasks here: affirmation; moral development; discipline, creating a grace-based home; helping your children get their stories straight; giving them a heart for God, and a faith for Christ; and today, I want to look at mentoring. We're going to flush out this mentoring in more than one message so this is sort of an introductory idea.

Let's look together at Ephesians, Chapter 6, Verse 1: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your Father and Mother' - which is the first commandment with a promise - 'that if they go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.' " So children are told to do what? Two things: 1) Obey your parents; 2) Honor your parents. Children obey and honor your parents. Notice what happens when children obey and honor their parents. First of all, they are doing the right thing when they obey. When they honor their parents, this comes with a promise and they are then enabled to enjoy life; things go well with them. For a child to obey and honor its parents then is a great secret of the child's success. When you tell a child to honor and obey your parents, they're thinking that's some kind of a burden. Exactly not that; it is the golden key to them enjoying their lives.

It says in Verse 4, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children or do not make them angry; instead, or but, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." So now it's interesting here, it says, "Fathers, do not exasperate or make your children angry, instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." The inference here is that if you do not bring your children up in the training and the instruction of the Lord, they will be exasperated, they'll be frustrated, they'll be angry, they'll be provoked to anger. I want to give my parents a good report because I had great parents, but they dropped out of church very early on when I was in 7th or 8th grade. I can't remember. My parents dropped out of church, and, as a result, I was not brought up in the training and instruction of the Lord. I did not obey my parents. I did not honor my parents. That's what the training and the instruction of the Lord is. For a child, it is to obey and honor your parents, along with a variety of other things. You can see there is a circular deal going on here. The circularity to this is that when we bring our children up in the training and instruction of the Lord, that is for them to understand that as they obey and honor their parents, they get to enjoy life. They get all good things.

When you and I as fathers do not bring our children up this way, then what happens? They don't get that instruction, they don't get that training, they don't understand the importance of honoring their parents, they don't understand the importance of obeying their parents, and the results and benefits of that and the final outcome of that is you have a lot of angry young men. We have a lot of angry young women because they have not been brought up this way.

I want to give you a metaphor because I think that this metaphor, the more I've thought about it this week, the more I like it, I really think it captures the whole of a child's development at one level at least. The metaphor is this: A young toddler venturing out from its parent while knowing that, at any time it wants, it can run back and cling to Daddy's leg in security. Just think about the image if you've had little babies and they start crawling around, then they start toddling around, then they start walking a little bit. What did they want to do? From the very earliest age, what does a child want to do? It wants to become what? Independent. And, you as its parent, from its very earliest age want this child to do what, to become what? Independent. It is the natural order of things that we would raise children who would become independent.

Moses wrote in Genesis, Chapter 2: "A man shall leave his father and mother." It is the natural order of things. So, as a little suckling, one of a mother's first early tasks is to wean the child from her breast, again making the child independent. All of the things we teach a child in their early years is so they might come independent. We want this little child to stand up. We want this little child to walk away from us. Why? Because we want the child to become independent. The child walks away, why? Because the child wants to become independent. If you think about nearly all conflicts in child rearing are the result of a power struggle over this process of becoming independent. Either a child wants too much or not enough or the parents wants to control or not enough.

This metaphor, I think, is very powerful. When the child becomes an adolescent and is developing friendships, and these friendships are very important, and the friendships don't mean less time with Mommy and Daddy, but the child wants the relationships. Why? Because the child wants to become independent, and the mother and father are delighted that the child wants these relationships. Why? Because the parent wants the child to become what? Independent

Then the child becomes a teenager and, of course, everything breaks down at this point. Why? Because the child wants to be independent. And the independence means what? Give me the car keys, please. What does Mommy say, "I'm not ready for my baby to drive yet." Eventually you work this out, the child gets in the car, the mother or father is in the passenger's seat, white knuckles, STOP, you getting too close to that car, don't do that, put your blinker on." "Mom, Dad, give me a break here. Can't you see I'm trying to become independent?" But, anyway, the child eventually somehow survives, drives by itself because he wants to become what? Independent. When you got your car, what did you want? You wanted freedom; another word for becoming independent. By then your parents were what? Glad that you were out of the house. Then about the time the child is a senior in high school, what's going on? Everybody is going what? Crazy. Why? Because this child must be what? Independent. He needs to be what? Out of this house. Please go to college, get a job in San Francisco. I can't take it anymore. I need you to be independent. This is what I've been trying to tell you, Dad, you need to let me be my own man.

You can see this metaphor of a child venturing out, but always feeling the security that he can run back to cling to Daddy's leg. Even as an adult, the power is in two things: roots and wings. You've heard this before. The greatest gift a parent can give its child, roots and wings. You've heard this before? The wings of independence but the security of roots. That's the big idea. Give your children the wings of independence but the security of roots.

The problem here is this. A lot of kids are doing on their own what other kids are doing with a lot of support. A lot of kids are having to do on their own what other kids are doing with a whole lot of support. What does this result in? They both might succeed; in fact, they are both very likely to succeed at some level, but it won't be the same because one is going to feel that whole nurtured support system, always able to run back and cling to Daddy's leg for security, and the other one is going to look around and say, "Where did they go?" That child is going to be what? Angry.

How many of you men, just out of curiosity, and I'm not talking about whether or not you were always walking with a frown, but on the inside how many of you as a young man grew up angry? Raise your hand. That's a lot of us. It's a real problem. The question is, will our kids grow up angry? I was thinking about my Dad who was a great dad, and he really didn't have a choice. He worked long, hard hours to support his family, and that was a tremendous contribution. He didn't have a dad. My grandfather deserted my dad; my dad never had a role model. My dad did a great job with the equipment that he had. You have to be very, very careful, men, when you read back on your dads.

C.S. Lewis was brutal on his dad. The thing about it though is that C.S. Lewis had a brother, Warney???, and his brother, Warney, didn't read back into their lives nearly as desperately as C.S. Lewis did. Historians have been very hard on Lewis' father. But you know what? Do you know why they were hard on his father? Because it's a one-sided story; never heard from the dad. You never heard how hard it was for the dad to make all the ends meet and all the things come together. You never heard Dad's side of the story. When you read back onto your miserable childhood, if you had one, and that made you angry and you didn't get mentored by your dad, remember, it's like in a divorce, the assessment of estrangement is different than the assessment of intimacy. If you had intimacy with your father, you would read that story one way, but you feel like you are estranged, you are going to read back into that differently.

This is the big lesson I have been learning during the series is that I need to reevaluate how I am reading back this story. It's like 20 years ago, I really thought my parents' intentions, I'm ashamed to say this, but I really feel like my parents' intentions were dark, like they were trying to confound me. That's not true. Just think about even your own failures as a father, if you are a father, to your own kids. You may have made

mistakes and errors in judgment, but you would never desire that your children would read your motives as bad. So some of us probably need to re-evaluate. That's a sidebar.

What is the chief task of a child then? We've talked about it. It is to what? Become independent. This is the chief task of a child - to become independent. A child's life is captured in this picture wanting to become increasingly independent while not feeling insecure or abandoned. That's what a child wants. The chief task of a child is to become independent. The child's bravery in becoming independent will be in proportion to how much security the child feels. We've all seen a little child wander away from its parents in a grocery store with a great big smile. It turns around and all of a sudden the security is gone and, therefore, the independence is shattered, and the child bursts into tears. And you have done the same thing even, perhaps, as an adult. You have done the same thing. You've gotten yourself into a pickle, you don't have anybody to mentor you, you turn around, no Daddy, you burst into tears. You don't do it in aisle where anybody can see; no, you do it at 4 a.m. in the morning when you can't sleep. The metaphor holds our whole life long.

What's the chief task of a dad then? Wings and roots; the wings of independence which brings to mind concepts like I've given a child identity, purpose, calling, vision, a mission, a task, doing things, education and vocation. A child needs its father to tell it things; things that it may learn on its own, but will be extremely disadvantaged if the father does not tell the child these things.

For example: My son is a junior, just finishing his junior year, at Auburn. He is a Mac'aholic; a Mac'addict. He has been involved in Apple computers ever since I can remember. When he was in the dorm in his freshman year, he developed a server hooked up through the Auburn computers. We were up there visiting one time. I said, "What's that under your bed there?" He said, "Aw, it's nothing." I said, "What is it?" "Ah, it's a server." "What's a server?" "Ah, I got this thing I put together called Why Macintosh, and I usually have 1,200 people on line down there underneath the bed from all around the world, in chat rooms, uploading articles, downloading articles. It's a Macintosh user's server for 1,200 people." I said, "Gosh, I'm glad I didn't unplug it."

When he heard that Apple Computer was looking for a campus representative, he really wanted that part-time job. He wrote a couple of letters, men, I'm telling you, Daddy or no Daddy, there's nobody who resist these letters because of his previous interest in Macintosh. He just wrote a couple of very outstanding letters. Well, they were good enough and the guy interviewed him, and the fellow said he would call him last Friday. They interviewed early in the week. John actually went back up to school, then came back home, went back up for the interview, came back home on Tuesday, and the guy said he would let him know on Friday.

Now, I've been around the block at least twice, so I knew what? The chances of him calling on Friday were no better than 50/50, right? I know that when you are hiring people things come up, you're working on your agenda, you've advertised a date, but you're not really deeply committed to calling that interviewee at that particular time. On Friday morning, about mid-morning about 10:30, when no call had come, I just thought I would introduce this idea to my son. I said, "Son, just so you don't get your expectations up too high, there's a good chance you're not going to hear from this guy today. It would be a very normal business practice for him to delay to Monday." Why did I tell him that? Because my wife went out every fifteen minutes and said, "Has he called you, has he called you?" She was driving us all crazy, you know? Did he call on Friday? No, no. Did my son worry about it all weekend long? Yes. Did he worry about it like he would have otherwise worried about it if he hadn't had a mentor to tell him what to expect? No. Did the guy call on Monday? Yes. Did he get the job? Yes.

What would an inexperienced youth do who didn't have a mentor? He might have even called up the guy and might have upset the whole thing. You know how that works. Kids need mentors. They need to be able to venture out, but also know they have a place where they can come. That's the wings.

Secondly, roots. Roots is an issue of security. Key concepts: relationships, safety, security, protection, stability, predictability, encouragement, solace, comforting, unconditional love, acceptance, approval, being there with your kids, and being a reasonable person when you are there with them. A lot of kids don't have this.

Bernard Weeks? ?? invited me to augment his ongoing ministry in the Orange County Jail two weeks ago. On the day we went in there were 6,524 prisoners at the Orange County Jail. Bernard specifically asked me if I would speak to the hardcore youth offenders, 14 - 17 years of age. I asked Bernard what they were in there for. He said, "Basically murder, rape, weapons, armed robbery, drugs, mostly drugs." I said, "How many of these young men have a father figure in their life?" He said, "Oh, maybe 10%." Bernard's on the ground, he's doing the ongoing ministry; he's the one making the investment. I'm a little bit player coming in to be there for an hour then I'm gone. My fear is how can I be a servant to Bernard and what he's doing?

When I arrived I walked around the room and handed each boy a nametag. Jim was there. Tom Long was there. I said, "I'll let you know later what that's about." About half way through the talk, I asked each of them to write their name on the nametag and put it on their chest. Then I went around, they were sitting at tables, I went down on my knee in front of each boy and looked at each in the eye. It took about 20 minutes to do this. I looked into his eyes, and I said, "Carlos Riviera, God knows your name, and he loves you very much. He knit you together in your mother's womb. He knows when you sit and when you rise. He knows your thoughts from afar. He knows everything you've ever done, and he wants to forgive you. If you will open yourself up to him, he will open himself up to you. You can change your life." Or I said something about like that to each boy. As you can imagine, two or three of them did not want not want to put on the nametags. I said, "Well, you put the nametag on, and I'll come back to you." All of them did it. Every one of them looked me back in the eyes, and I can say with a great sense of hope, not one of these young men looked like he was irretrievable. You could see a spark of life in every one of them. Toward the end of the deal, I kind of lost track and knew I had a few more guys over here, so I said, "Who have I not spoken to yet?" One of the young murderers said, "You haven't said it to him yet." He wanted his friend to get it to. I knew I couldn't go down there and give them the blessing, but, it did occur to me that as an adult male, I could give them a blessing, so I wanted to give them a blessing. Bernard is watching them all the time. I wanted to give them my blessing.

When we broke up, I don't even know where this came from, they were all starting out, and I said, "You know, I am into hugs if anybody needs a hug. Come on up here, and I'll give you a hug." Twelve young men came over and said, "Can I have a hug?" Then they stepped out into the hallway and the guards put handcuffs on the wrist of one and handcuffed him to another, then they marched them down the hall back to their jail cells.

Our children need wings of independence and they need roots of security. We are the only ones who can do that for our children.

Let us pray:

Father, when we think of all the young men who are angry, Lord, that we would do what we could do in our own families and perhaps as mentors to other young men. Give them the wings of independence and the security of roots. We ask this in your name Jesus. Amen.

/cjb