

Task #10 - A Daily Dad
The 12 Tasks of an Effective Father

This series has been going very well. This last week I made a decision, and David Delk, everybody knows David Delk, the Chief Operating Officer of Man in the Mirror, who is a very gifted communicator in his own right, has agreed to co-author a book with me and we're going to call it, "The Dad in the Mirror." The subtitle will be something like "Becoming a Dad That Can Make a Difference," which, by the way is the title that you all selected on the survey for our next seminar. The next seminar is going to be called "Dads That Make a Difference." A little tidbit or two there.

How many of you like Eric Clapton, the guitarist? He's incredible. He's one of my very favorites. Many people think he is one of the finest guitarists of all times. He was over in Tampa a few weeks ago, and I took my wife, Patsy. We had a tremendous time. As we were sitting there, all kinds of people like Eric Clapton. About three or four seats down from us were a couple of young guys who were really into it. About half way through the concert they got even more into it, and they lit up a little Mexican Gold. So, it's whopping through the air; very, very strong. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to know what's going on there. You know, that concert kept getting better and better and better. Made me want to go on a Mission's trip.

Things have changed so much. There is a wonderful book out called, "Raising a Modern Day Knight" by Robert Louis, the MC -- of Coalition of Men's Ministries. We've just selected him as the pastor of the year, and in October he will receive the Pastor of the Year Award, and he will be coming to Atlanta to receive that. I hope that some of you will be coming to learn how to build a men's ministry in your church. Great book. How many of you have read the book or heard of it? Okay, we need to get the word out on this book. You can read it in a couple of hours; one sitting if you like. He quotes some specific thoughts in here that I had not seen for a decade, and I thought it was very enlightening.

It was recorded on the evening news one night that the seven major problems recorded by schools in the year 1940 were the following: talking out of turn; chewing gum; making noise; running in the halls; cutting in line; violating the dress code; and, of course, that old standby, littering. Forty years later, though, the seven major problems reported by schools were: drug abuse; alcohol abuse; pregnancy; suicide; rape; robbery and assault. That was in 1980. Things have gotten worse. It's interesting. I thought that smoking pot was such a bad thing, and I suppose it has its negatives; however, something new has come on the scene since 1992 and it was the cover story in a recent issue of "USA Today" newspaper. The cover story is why freak dancing freaks out schools. How many of you have heard of freak dancing? Well, for those of you who have not, let me just read a couple of things from the paper. This is the beginning sentence of the article, "At the certain club, a handful of kids knelt into a kind of congo line that redefines the term 'joined at the hip'. As boys strut their pelvises into girl's behinds to the throbbing base of the hip hop anthem Big Timpon????? One haltered-top girl stoops so far over the floor that she looks like a center trying to snap a football except she's also gyrating wildly against the boy's groin. How do you like it so far?

Many schools not knowing exactly how to handle this have been canceling spring dances outright and are suspending all dances going into the fall trying to figure out how to respond to it. This is a movement that is sweeping wildly across the country at this time, and they just don't know how to handle it. A couple of other things: One young person says it's just the way everybody dances. Well, it's not the way everybody dances, but there is quite a group of people doing it. "Honor roll kids do it," the article says. "Church-going kids do it," the article says.

Here's another one. "The difference now," educators say since the movement started, "is that the moves are becoming more sexually explicit." I'm just quoting the article. I am not making this up. "Kids mounting each other, straddling each other, sandwiching one another, one person says, it's encouraging sexual promiscuity. It has to be those kids are getting turned on. This woman calls it standing sex." In another report, professional dancers have a different view. "Pelvic thrusting, crouch grabbing that has nothing to do with sexuality," says Nancy Newell, a high school dropout who runs the D.C. Dance -----

She said, "To me it has everything to do with creativity. Whether we like what the message is or not, it is still creative expression," she says, "And if we stop doing that, then we're really in trouble."

One more: One 16-year old girl commenting on this says, "We don't get raunchy. It's not like we're getting naked," says this girl who has danced with six girls so far this night. She says she has her limits, like "When guys put their hands down her pants," she says, "I have morals. I walk away." Unbelievable, huh fellows? Well, how does it happen? How does it come that a child will behave in this way? Are you worried? We're growing up in a very different culture these days, and are you worried about whether your children might end up doing something like this, or worse? And, if you're not worried about, should you be?

What I want to do this morning is to take a look at I think is a pretty fail-safe preventative for this kind of thing happening to you. The first thing my wife said when we started talking about this article was, "Our kids would never do that." It was interesting because it had never even occurred to me to wonder whether my kids would ever do that because I was so utterly convinced that because I am so involved in their lives that I know so much about what they're doing that it never occurred to me to wonder if they were doing it. I know what they're doing. I'm involved in their lives. But, I thought it was interesting. I wonder how many men would read this article and then have to wonder. I wonder if my kids are doing that? I wonder if my kids would do that? So that right there, if you can catch that subtle nuance of those two positions, that's what I want this whole talk to turn on this morning.

Let's go to the Scriptures, Proverbs 29, Verse 15 says, "The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother." On that last verse there where it says, "...but a child left to himself disgraces his mother." What are some of the other versions of Bibles that you all have say there? Bring shame, neglect. What's that the New Life Standard? Okay, what else do we have? A child who gets his own way? What are some other ideas? Basically, a child left to himself, a child neglected, a child who gets his own way will bring what on his mother, disgrace or shame? Essentially, this word means to be set off, to be put away, it can even mean to be divorced, but there's a separation between a father and his child. This verse says, "The rod of correction imparts wisdom," and, so this is most often used for a discipline check.

We have already done that discipline which sets the boundaries and shapes all that kind of stuff. But, you know, there is another nuance to discipline, and I don't really think it's found in this text particularly. It's not only in what is helping our children to do what they ought and ought not do, it's a kind of discipline that nurtures the child.

How many of you have ever tried to grow a bougainvillea vine? Well, some of you have. I've tried a number of times, and there is something about it I just don't get. The idea is if you take the vine, the little plant as it's growing up, you create a structure, if you will, whether it's nails or a some sort of a trellis, and then you discipline the plant. You train the plant to go where it's supposed to go. If you don't discipline it, it becomes wild and shoots start going everywhere. So you trim it, you train it, you discipline it and it's supposed to go right where you want it to go. That's discipline. But what if you never put any water on the plant? What if you never give the plant any fertilizer? What if you don't nourish the plant at the very roots of the plant? Well, you have to do both things, don't you?

I do not want to talk to you this morning about the training, the disciplining, taking care of the wild shoots. What I want to talk to you about is putting fertilizer, putting water into the soil, preparing the right soil for the child to grow in, the nourishment of the child, the nurturing of the child by developing a nurturing relationship. Does this make sense so far? Do you see the difference? Okay, good.

When we look at this scripture and other scriptures, we see examples David, Eli, Samuel who did not nurture their sons, did not nurture their daughters, and they had horrible consequences. Proverbs 17:21 says, "To have a fool for a son brings grief." Proverbs 10:13 says, "A foolish son is his father's ruin." Summary. What is a child supposed to do? Honor and obey his parents. And what happens when the child doesn't honor and obey his parents, he becomes a fool, he disgraces his mother, ruins his life, and brings grief on his father.

What is it that a dad can do to make sure that his children don't feel neglected? Don't feel like they have been left to themselves; don't feel like they have been sent away. I venture that if you were able to interview the freak dancers, you would find one of two things: children who would say that well my dad never put any fertilizer in the soil; or all my dad is ever interested in is cutting off the wild shoots. What kind of people do you like to be around? Do you like to be around somebody who is always negative? Do you like to be around somebody who is always interrupting you? You are trying to share what's on your heart and mind, they listen to about two sentences and they say, "Oh, yeh, let me tell what you should do." Do you like to be around someone who doesn't show you respect, but sort of talks down to you all the time? What kind of person or dad do you think your children like to be around? Our children like to be around the same kind of people we like to be around, and we, as fathers, really have a responsibility to understand that we need to treat our children as human beings.

I want to give you five ideas, five practical traits, if you will, of a nurturing relationship:

The first characteristic is respect. Turn with me to Matthew, Chapter 7, Verse 12. We're done in Proverbs. Matthew Chapter 7, Verse 12 is known as the what? The Golden Rule and it reads, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you." And then watch this because we don't talk about this all the time, "For this sums up the Law and the Prophets." This sums up everything that's in the Law and the Prophets. Jesus, this is King Jesus, when there is no king, people do what seems right in their own eyes, which is what freak dancing is all about. They don't have a king. This is King Jesus. King Jesus says that if you do to others what you would have them do to you, then you're doing the right thing. Everything I am teaching you is summed up in doing this. And so, one thing that we would have other people do to us is to respect us. One of the most important things we can do for our kids is to respect them.

"I can't believe that. You know I told you what I wanted you to do and" It's interesting, C.S. Lewis has written on this, and you can observe this in any grocery store in America all day long, parents will talk to their children in a way they would not talk to a complete stranger. The derision, the disgust that they express toward their children, what do you think that does to the little soul, the little spirit of a child? It's like taking a blowtorch to the vine; it withers the soul of the child.

The second characteristic of a nurturing relationship is that it is positive. You've all worked with this guy that I'm about to describe. I worked with a guy one time, and you know what a black hole is, right? A black hole is, basically, a place where the gravity is so strong that it sucks the light back in. Light can't even escape. You've all worked with this guy where when he walks in the room it's like he sucks up all the oxygen out of the room. He just disappears. He is such a negative person. I was sharing a similar idea a number of years ago when I guy came up to me afterwards and said, "You know, I have six kids, and when I walk into the room within ten minutes they are all gone. I am such a negative person." One of the characteristics of a nurturing father is that he has a positive attitude. He's building up his children. Certainly this is obvious.

The third characteristic is the idea of listening; listening without interrupting to give your advice about what the child ought to do or not do. This is one of the biggest areas I've had to work on personally. I'm a teacher, for crying out loud. I teach, I have answers, and besides I think I know everything anyway, so no kids going to come to me with a question that I don't already know. They don't need to finish their question. I know what the question is. I'm so smart. Then the little child's soul kind of withers a little bit, and they go away. It's a reality, men, that, basically, how our children feel about the relationship is based upon two things: how we interact with them on a personal basis, what we say; and then, how much time we spend with them.

My son is getting married next summer. We were talking the other day and he said to my wife, "You know, Mom, you've always been my number one fan." I have to tell you I was taken back by that, because, you know, if you were participating in the conversations my wife and I have together, you would come to the conclusion that we're both co-equal number one fans of this boy. So why did he come to the conclusion that she's the number one fan? "She's the one who listens to us."

The fourth idea is the word care. Around here we say the most important thing we want men to take away from this Bible Study is the thought, "You know that would be a group of men that would really care about me personally." That sums up the Law and the Prophets of the Bible Study. The Golden Rule of the Bible Study is that we want to care about men. You are all in environments all day long where people don't really care; at least their care is limited to the extent of the commercial possibilities of the relationship. You know what I'm talking about here. We want this to be a place where people really care.

So here it is, when I was growing up I knew I could call my mom and dad anytime I wanted to, but I also knew they would never call me. Today, looking back at it, I really have come to the understanding, I think, that what they thought they were doing was giving me space. What I received from that was that they didn't really care. Stop giving your kids so much space; space they don't want.

The final idea is the word available. How many of you, this week, have had to make a phone call to get somebody on the telephone, and they didn't return your call, and you called again, they didn't return your call, and after a while you stopped trying to get through? Why? What was the message? They're not available. They're just not that interested. Now, it's not as bad with my son as I made it out to be. It was just a way of expressing himself. You have to be available, not just to get the kid started like once a month, but you have to have a daily, incremental effort. If you want them to work properly you have to put a little effort into it on a regular basis. You have to be there. You have to be available. That's how this thing works. You don't wind your kids up, turn them loose and expect them to keep spinning. You have to be available on a regular basis. So the idea is that a nurturing dad, and this is the big idea for the day, is a daily dad. A nurturing dad is a daily dad.

When John said this I realized that Mom is the one who is taking the phone calls for the money; she's got the purse strings. But, what John doesn't understand is that Patsy and I have created a division of labor. "Patsy, you take care of paying the bills, and I'll take care of having the money there to pay the bills." The boy, of course, knows that but he is not going to think about that. He's going to think about the personal action and what I'm telling him. So, here's what I did. I said, "You know, I am also his co-equal, number one fan. In order to make sure he knows that, here's what I am going to do." I sent him an e-mail, and I said, "Son, you're up at Auburn, I'm down here in Orlando. You have a lot of different wedding arrangements." Couples today kind of do the planning together. A lot more of the parents are not as involved anymore. I said, "Son, I want to be available to you because I know there will be a lot of errands that will need to be run, deposits taken over to a reception site, a contract returned, a phone call made, something dropped off, something picked up, and so I would like to volunteer to be your gofer here in Orlando." Ten minutes later I got an e-mail back. "Gosh, Dad, I would really appreciate that. I was wondering how I was going to be able to get all these things done." Even when they're gone, a nurturing dad is a daily dad.

Men, some of you didn't do this; your kids are gone. You need to forgive yourself and get on with it, and do the things you can to be a nurturing father or nurturing grandfather today. Men, some of you have fathers who didn't do this to you. You need to get over it. You need to forgive your father, maybe even tell him you forgive him if that's appropriate, and get over it and get on with your life. You need to be wise and nurture where you can your children today and your grandchildren. And do it every day. Show them respect, and what else? Have a positive attitude. What else? Listen to them without interrupting. What else? Show them that you truly do care. What else? And be available because a nurturing dad is a daily dad.

Let us pray:

Father, a talk like this has a potential to rip open so old wounds and make some new ones. Lord, the purpose of this talk is not to create guilt, but to bring separated parties back into contact with each other just as the two sides of an open wound cannot heal until they are brought into contact with each other. I pray that you would bring into contact any man that needs to be brought into contact with his father or his son, and that you would bring healing through King Jesus, that you, Jesus, would be our King, and we would seek to do what seems right in our own eyes.

Lord, also give us the confidence that if we are a nurturing daily dad that we don't have to worry about what our kids are going to be doing when we're not looking. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

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