

# The Journey to Biblical Manhood

## Challenge 4: Fathering

### Session 2: How Your Child Decides How Much You Care

Unedited Transcript

Pat Morley

Good morning, men. Today we say goodbye to a member of our Bible study. He's been coming for 15 years. He's taking a job up in Savannah and so, Brad, I wonder if you would just stand up. Why don't we give a very warm send off to Brad Krieger? I'm going to miss you, Brad.

Please turn in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 6 verse 4. As we get started, let's do a shout out. Today we'll do this one to Iron Men, four men who have recently started meeting on Saturdays at 9:00 AM to stand together, pray together, and to encourage one another. Mark Wheeler is their leader in Richmond Heights, Ohio, which is near Cleveland. I wonder if you would join me in giving Iron Men a rousing and a warm Man in the Mirror welcome to the Bible study. One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, men. We're glad to have you with us.

We are in a series. It's called The Journey to Biblical Manhood. We are in the fourth challenge, which is on fathering. Today, well, these faith and life objectives that we've had, we did talk last week about this first objective, the one that dealt with understanding fathering the heart versus fathering for performance or fathering to perform. The second one is that, by the end of this challenge, I will have made discipling my children, grandchildren, or mentoree a top priority in my life. That's the appeal to the head part of it.

Today we're going to talk about ... We talked about you and fathering to perform versus fathering the heart last time. Today I want to talk about this a little bit from the kids' perspective. How does your child decide how much you care? To help us put ourselves in the right frame of mind on this, I want to ask you the question: How did you decide whether or not you thought your dad cared and maybe your mom?

The narratives that we play, the stories that we retell in our mind, the older I get, the more I realize how inaccurate those stories can be, especially if it's a story that I've constructed in isolation without the benefit of hearing the other side of the story. There's a proverb that says the first to present his case seems right until another comes forward and questions him. You look at politics and you take an issue, any issue, boom, two sides, two ways of looking at totally opposite. People believe absolutely as firmly in any of these two opposites as can be believed. We interpret the things that happen to us as children through a set of eyes, through a perspective, and we come to these conclusions, we may or may not be right, but we do, many of us, come to the conclusion that our parents either really, really cared deeply about us or they really didn't care that much.

My own narrative ... Sometimes I think we pick a story that sort of represents a lot of other stories that we can't really remember and over time, we remember one story because it really does sort of accurately reflect what was going on. My own story is that my mother, when she passed away, I didn't feel anything. I thought that was a little strange so I went to a counselor and I discovered a number of things, but my counselor helped me go back to a narrative, to a story that I have replayed in my mind thousands of times, I'm sure. I was in little league. Little leaguers are nine to 12 years old so I was probably about 10 years old. My dad was a very hardworking man. See, at the time, I didn't understand how hard he had to work in order to provide for our family. I just thought he wasn't there. My mother was very much a go-getter kind of a person too and so she was involved in a lot of different things.

I had a baseball game and I remember my mother and father asking if they could come and watch me play baseball. I remember telling them, "No, that's okay. I'd really rather have you not come." They pressed in a little bit. I said, "No, I really don't want you to come." They said, "Well, we really, really would like to come." I said, "No, I don't want you to come." It got to be into this brawl. By the time we reached the climax of this, I said, "You can't come to my game. I don't want you at my game. Please don't come to my game." Finally, finally, one of my great strengths is I tend to be on the persuasive side. One of my great weaknesses is that I tend to be on the persuasive side. Somehow I persuaded my mom and dad not to come to that little league game. Then I threaded my baseball glove over the handlebars and cried all the way to the baseball field because they let me win the argument.

In my mind, that is the narrative that I go back to, my go-to narrative, about why, for a long time, I believed, until this counselor helped me, why I believed that my parents didn't really care about me. How did you decide whether or not you thought your parents cared about you? Today we're going to talk about how your child is going to make that same decision about how much they think you care about them.

First up, two things every child wants and needs to know. Our text today, first one is Ephesians chapter 6 verse 4. I hope you're there. "Fathers, do not exasperate your children," or, "Fathers, do not provoke your children." Now, keep your finger there because we didn't read the whole verse. Turn over a couple, three pages, to Colossians chapter 3 verse 21, which says, "Fathers, do not embitter your children," or, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children." Both of these two verses say essentially the same thing. They are different Greek words but essentially meaning the same things. Fathers, don't irritate, don't provoke your children. One says even don't do it to anger, don't provoke them to anger or exasperate, embitter their ...

Now turn back to the previous verse and let's see what the rest of the verse says. It says, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children." Then it tells you what you should do. "Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." That's what we should do. We should bring up our kids that way. Then back to the other verse, Colossians 3:21, the rest of that verse is what we shouldn't do. It says, "Fathers, do not embitter your children or they will become," what? Discouraged. Don't discourage your children. "Rather, bring them up in the training and the instruction of the Lord."

This is like the substance. This is like the essence of the whole Bible's teaching addressed to fathers in their role with their kids. Why is it, do you think, that the Holy Spirit decided to preserve this idea? Why this idea instead of some other idea? Well, a lot of it goes to the stereotype of what it means to be a dad. The stereotype is the mother is the nurturer who loves and hugs the child and the father is the strict disciplinarian who brings down the wrath of God when the child doesn't obey. That's a stereotype, right?

But stereotypes exist often for some kernel of general truth that's sometimes applicable, not always. Bell curve distribution on all these stereotypes. But, it is generally true that, as dads, we tend to be the ones that bring structure to the family, the discipline, if you will, to the family. Now, I realize that when you make a generalization like that, you can immediately think of 80 reasons why that's not completely true and I agree, but if we can't make generalizations, we can't discuss anything so we're going to make that generalization.

There are two things that every child needs and wants from their father. The first thing is unconditional love. Every kid, boy or girl, every kid is born into a system where they're only as good as their last performance. You know that life is like that. You're only as good as your last performance. If you're not very good at kickball, you're going to be the last one picked because you can't perform. If you don't get really good grades, you're not going to be invited into the honor society. If you don't have good looks, you're not going to be invited to be part of the cool crowd because so much of life is based on performance. A child needs to know that it doesn't make any difference whether I get picked for the team or the honor society or I'm wandering with the cool kids, I know that my dad really loves me.

The second thing that every child needs and wants to know is that my dad is going to protect me. My dad is not going to let me have my own way. Now, "folly is bound up in the heart of the child" so the child's not going to think that way overtly, but in the heart of hearts, every child wants guardrails.

I heard a story from a friend, my neighbor. I have this neighbor. He's the most amazing guy. He's like this adventurer. He flew an ultralight plane without navigational equipment, just a compass and a walkie talkie to his other ultralight buddy, and they followed the islands from Florida all the way down to South America. On the way back, my friend, my neighbor, he radioed his partner. He said, "We should have seen land by now." His partner said, "Yeah, we should have." He said, "Well, you want to go right or left?" "Well," he said, "Why don't we go right?" They went right and they found land. Otherwise, I would have never known he had taken the trip because he would have died before I met him. He's really an adventurer.

He told me they just got back from a trip out to California to the Big Sur area. They rented a motor home. He was telling me, he said there was this road, this very narrow, windy road. It went back and forth. He said, "I have never been more terrified in my life." He said, "There were no guardrails. If I went over the edge of that road, I'd be history." That's what happens to kids when they don't have guardrails. If you're designing a road, if you're designing a path and there is a place that there is danger for the motorist, you put a guardrail there. It's the same way if you're a father. When you're helping to design the path your child is going to take and you're trying to help them navigate that, you see the places where there's potential danger and you put up guardrails. If you don't, your kid will think that you don't care about them. We'll talk more about that.

There are kind of like four scenarios here. I heard this idea first from Larry Crabb when our kids were like teeny tiny tots. He said that the two important things, the ways to say this, what I've been talking about, the thing to say to the child is, "Yes, I love you and, no, you can't have your own way." Almost, virtually, I've got a generalization, but virtually every parenting disaster from the perspective of the child who's trying to decide how much you care will come by you getting that wrong.

There are three kinds of dads I want to talk about here. The disconnected dad, it's, "No, I don't love you and, yes, you can have your own way." Let's just take a child who wants to go see an R-rated a movie. Let's just say it's a 12-year-old child, maybe a 13-year-old child, son or daughter, wants to go see this R-

rated movie and comes in and says, "Hey, dad. Some of my friends are going to go see this movie." The dad says, "Yeah, go ahead. Whatever you want to do. That's fine. Be sure to tell your mom when you're going to be home." What's he communicating? He's communicating, "I don't care. No, I don't love you. Yeah, you can do whatever you want to do."

Second is the authoritarian father. "No, I don't love you and, no, you can't have your own way." This is the one you ask a different child coming to a different dad, obviously, but with the same question. "Can I go see this R-rated movie with my friends?" "Are you kidding? Are you out of your mind? Do you know what kind of family this is? We don't do that kind of thing in this family. Absolutely not." That's pretty self-explanatory. You might wonder why I was so good at that.

Then there's the permissive father. This child comes, asks the dad, "Can I go see the movie?" The father and goes and puts his arm around his 13-year-old son and says, "Hey, buddy. Yeah. That's awesome. You can go ahead and do that. Yes, I love you and, yes, you can do whatever you want to do." Eventually that all comes back to roost.

There is the fourth kind of dad and that's the affirming father, the one we want to be focused on, the one who says, "Yes, I love you and, no, you can't have your own way." The child comes to the affirming father and says, "Hey, dad. Some of my friends are going to go see this R-rated movie. Is it all right if I go?" The father, instead of keeping his nose buried in his book or newspaper, puts it down and he says to his son, he says, "Son, what do you think that movie is all about?" The son begins to explain what the movie's about. The father asks questions, "Son, do you think that's the kind of thing that we want to be exposing our family to? Is that consistent with our family values?" Actually talk about what's going on in the heart of the child and help the child come to his or her own conclusion that that's not something that would be appropriate for somebody my age. The message: My dad really cares about me. My dad loves me. My dad is not going to let me do what I want but he's done this, of course, in a loving way.

The Big Idea today is simply this: **Yes, I love you and, no, you can't have your own way.** Remember the father the heart question from last week is: What's going on in my child's heart that's making them behave this way? That's from our perspective. What we want the child to hear is, "Yes, I love you and, no, you can't have your own way." Yeah, folly is bound up in the heart of the child so, no, you can't have your own way but I view myself as a mentor, as a guide, putting the guardrails where they need to be so that you won't fall off the cliff.

Second thing to talk about here today is how we say I love you. How do we say that? Well, obviously words. The words "I love you" and the words "I'm proud of you," this is one important way we communicate that we care. I think a sign of the times, dads are getting a lot better about this. It would have been nice to have heard this when I was growing up. I kind of knew my dad loved me but he was that silent generation. I kind of knew that he loved me. I kind of knew that he was proud of me. I wasn't sure.

When I was 35 years of age, I quit high school, joined the army, all kinds of problems, but about the age of 35, I really had this longing to get reconnected with my dad so I asked him if he would go to lunch on his birthday. We started going to lunch on his birthday. Two, three years into this, one day we're walking out. I'm going to my car. He's going to his truck. They have been parked next to each other. Just impulsively, I said, "Dad, let me give you a hug." I reached out to hug him. Man, he charged me like a grizzly bear. He didn't say anything. I said, "Dad, can I give you a hug?" He goes (growling noise) and he grabbed me and he lets out this, as some of you've heard me tell this before, this deep primordial groan,

(growling sound), like 20 seconds. When it was done, we were both bawling. I looked at him. I said, "Dad, I love you." He said, "I love you too, son."

That was the first time I'd ever heard my dad, that I remember, hearing my dad tell me that he loved me but it's made all the difference in the world. In fact, from that day forward, neither one of us ever spoke about it, but our entire family became verbal expressors of love, my mother, my three brothers. It was crazy. In fact, so crazy ... Well, another story for another time.

Verbal expressions are so important. Just like every day just make a commitment like, "Every day I'm going to say to my kids, 'I love you and I'm proud of you.'" Then second is your presence or time. Let me just say this. We can't go in depth on every one of these but just let me say this about time. If you do not have enough time for your children, you can be 100% certain that you are not following God's will for your life. Want me to say that again? If you don't have enough time for your children, you can be 100% certain that you are not following God's will for your life. Relationships create responsibilities, the chief responsibility of fathering, one of them is time.

Then, third is your heart. You know, one of my big sayings, you've probably heard it before, but people know if you're for them or not. One day, my son was playing basketball on the high school basketball team, Christian school. The coach was screaming and hollering as he did all the time at the boys. The parents were usually murmuring about the coach yelling so much at the boys. After the game, I said, "John, I just can't take this anymore. I'm going to have to say something to your coach for being so rough on you boys." He said, "Dad, what are you talking about?" He said, "Coach loves us." I said, "I'm violating one of my own principles." Your personality doesn't determine whether or not somebody thinks you're for them or not. It's whether or not they actually care about you that determines whether or not they think you're for them or not. One coach ... Who is the old Dallas Cowboys coach that never ... Tom Landry. He was like this stoic but his players knew that he was absolutely for them. Then you have someone like a Bobby Knight who's screaming and throwing chairs and his players swear by him. The issue is is that people know if you're for them or not. It's when something is going on in your heart, it comes through. It's not style, it's heart.

Those are some ways we say I love you. The big idea today: Our kids, what they want to know, the thing that's going to help them decide how much we care about them is if they perceive, "Yes, I love you and, no, you can't have your own way." Then how we can say, "You can't have your own way."

I think the main thing to say here is structure. The way we say that you can't have your own way is structure. The reason we do all this is that it's our responsibility to lead, protect, and provide for these kids and we're trying to protect our kids. We're putting up these guardrails. We're creating structure. To protect them, let's just call them the big five: video, movies, friends, parties, staying out too late. Now, honestly, does that not get about 80% of all of the issues that you have with your kids once they start asserting themselves and don't do everything you tell them to do? It pretty much does. You know, whether that's video can be, used to be TV, it's not really TV anymore. It could be YouTube or video games. Video media. Then movies, arguing over movies. Who their friends are. Sometimes it's having friends that are like too old for them.

My wife, we had a young man like three or four years older than our son invite our son to go out to Bithlo to the drag races. My wife said, "Absolutely not. That doesn't feel right to me." Well, it turns out now he's a registered sexual predator. He was a pedophile. That's a guardrail. That's structure. No, you can't have your own way. Well, he was so upset that he couldn't go to that drag race. I don't think he's

upset today because I was talking to him last week. He said, "Yeah, I Googled that guy." That's how I know he's a sexual predator. He said, "Yeah, I Googled him a couple months ago." This is my son telling me this. "The first hit on his name was sexual predator." Isn't that interesting? That's why we tell our kids, "You can't have your own way."

Sometimes it's too much structure. Yeah. Authoritarian parent, maybe. Sometimes it's too little of structure, permissive parent. But the affirming father is seeking to strike the right balance and making sure that the guardrails are there so the kid doesn't careen off.

It looks to me like, because of time, a lot more could be said but I'm going to say this. This is very important. Just remember this. A child can accidentally turn out wrong but turning out right is no accident. A child can accidentally turn out wrong but turning out right is no accident. The secret, it's not really a secret, this is called the skeleton key for how your child will decide how much you care and therefore how much influence you as a dad are going to have on them is going to be if they can say the big idea today or feel like we're saying this to them. "Yes, I love you and, no, you can't have your own way."

Let's go ahead and discuss the questions today. What I'd like to suggest is this, two things: Number one, that you spend about five minutes on each of the three questions. Once you've spent five minutes on question one, move on to question two. The second thing I want to say is the means to make that happen. Not every person has to answer every question every time. That would take two hours. Not every person has to answer every question every time. Take about five minutes on question one and then maybe, this is actually Jim Angelakos's idea, maybe next week you'll try to come up with a little tool to ... Maybe we'll have a gong or something at five minutes. Anyway, go ahead and do that now and then we'll ... Do we have any first time visitors this morning? Any first timers? No first timers. We'll reconvene a few minutes before the 8:00 hour. Thank you. Break to the tables for discussion.

Yeah. Yeah. These are all categories and we try to think that they're exclusive categories. Again, it's the journey to Biblical manhood that we're on. We're building guardrails for ourselves by going on this journey. That's what all these messages really are, putting up guardrails on the journey to Biblical manhood. With that, let's pray.

Our dearest father, thank you for these men. Thank you for where you have each of us on our journeys. I pray, God, that there would be lessons in here for each of us today that would make us more like your son Jesus. In his name we now pray, amen.

Have a great weekend. Happy Memorial Day.