

LAUNCH: Strategies for Launching Your Career & Family

Looking for Affirmation in All the Wrong Places

Edited Transcript

Featured Speaker: Sheldon Wilson, CEO of WCC Services

Brett Clemmer:

Hey, good morning, Men. It's great to see you this morning. Thanks for coming out. What is this? The best place to be on a Friday morning. It is so awesome to see you guys here. I want to do a couple shout outside before we get started here. We got a group of guys at **Hope Mills Men's Ministry**, a group of six who have been meeting on Saturdays at 9:00 using the video bible study that we're broadcasting here. Wayne Heath up at Hope Mills, North Carolina. Then, we've got an area director in Ohio, Phil Elmore, is doing a great job reaching churches all throughout the Covington area of Ohio. Anybody here know where Covington, Ohio is? Good, one person, two, three. Who just wants to know where Covington is? One person. Well, that's horrible.

All right. So, why don't we give these guys a rousing welcome here. And in Morley style, one, two, three. All right. Hey, I am so excited for this morning with you guys. We've got a speaker in this series that we're doing. We're doing The Launch series where we're talking about successful strategies for building your career and family. This is the third week, and three more weeks after this we're going to give you an opportunity to sign up for a mentoring experience, going through a coaching guide that Pat's put together. So, I'm really excited about the mentoring experience. Now, if you want to be a mentor we would love to have ... We need some more mentors. We would love to have some guys step up to be mentors, and you might be saying, "I have no idea how to be a mentor." It doesn't matter if you know how. We will show you how. A week from tomorrow, on September 28, a week from tomorrow, September 28, we're going to have a half-day workshop at the Man in The Mirror office up in Casselberry.

So, two things, if you want to be a mentor or if you don't want to be a mentor but you're table leader is telling you that you should want to be a mentor, which is equally valid. Just listen to him, and come out a week from tomorrow at eight o'clock in the morning at the Man in the Mirror offices. There'll be about probably like a \$10 suggested donation if you can do that. We'll have some resources for you. We'll have lunch for you, coffee and something in the morning. But, we'd love to have a bunch of guys come out and learn about how

to be a mentor, and then at the end of the series we're going to connect guys up for that mentor experience.

Some of you went to our gala last year. How many of you went to the No Family Left Behind gala? Wow, that's fantastic. Thank you so much for coming. Well, I'm walking through the gala last year and in a sea of faces there's this table that just completely draws me over. I don't know anybody sitting at the table, and I'm the President of the ministry so I'm supposed to like be nice to everybody, right? So, I walk up to this table of guys, and I stick out my hand and I shake this guy's hand. Have you ever heard the idea of love at first sight? Well, this guy and I we were like bros at first sight, like three min ... Like, 30 seconds into the conversation I knew that Sheldon Wilson was going to be my friend. I don't know how I knew, I just knew that he was going to be my friend. I had no idea how much of a true brother Sheldon was going to turn into.

So, I'm so excited to have the opportunity to invite Sheldon to join us today. Sheldon in the 90s was a very successful investment banker. He worked on Wall Street, had an office in a very tall building you may have heard of. There were two of them across the street from each other, and had an office in the World Trade Center, actually was not in the World Trade Center the day that it went down, but had an office there, could have been there. I don't know if you're going to share that story, but now you have to. Since 2001, though, he's been down here in Florida. He's been running a company that serves throughout the United States, mostly in the southeast, called WCC Services. They're a Federal and general contractor, and they do large-scale projects in lots of different industries but a lot of disaster recovery, forestry, sort of a wide array of stuff.

His proudest achievement, I would say, is that he is married to Marie and he's got five kids, three sons and two daughters, right? And, three grandkids. Look at him, and two of those grandchildren are brand new this week. Brooklyn and Callie were born this week. So, I'm going to introduce Sheldon the way he introduced me a few weeks ago at an event we were at. He said, "This is Brett Clemmer." So, this is Sheldon Wilson. He's my brother from another mother, but the same Father. Please welcome Sheldon Wilson.

Sheldon Wilson:

Thank you, brother. So, the fraternity of brothers of MIM. I love you all. Thanks for having me, guys, this morning. Brett and I, as he said, met last year. It was a sea of faces and it was this one table of black faces. Let's be clear about it. That was a tremendous event. It moved me and everyone that was invited to my table in a tremendous way. I had not experienced that level of congruency and that level of contrition and grown men just sharing their hearts and sharing their stories, and it just really moved everybody that was at the table. It was sort of what I was used to when I first came into the Lord, when you had to give testimony, and you had to just sort of talk about what God brought you from. I'm very grateful for his friendship, and this guy's the real deal, so just give him a little hand of applause. He works hard.

As Brett already mentioned, I was born in this little country town in the North that no one maybe heard of called Brooklyn, New York. Maybe you saw Welcome Back, Kotter and you remember the population there. I tell a lot of young people here when I minister to them that there's really no difference between Brooklyn and say Orlando, with the exception of that you may have 30 guys on your block, we had 3000 on our block, so you had to grow up real fast, right? My mom came here in the late 60s, registered nurse, with my dad. Things were the way they were. No one knew they were poor, or anything, you just didn't have extra. She worked really hard. She set an example of work ethic in my life and my sisters' lives. I was the eldest and the only son.

Right around the age of five or six my dad decided he was going to go find work back in the Caribbean. We're.. our family's from Trinidad. He leaves us at I'm about six or seven, and I don't see the guy til when I'm maybe around 10 or 11 years old. I don't recall him calling for Christmases or birthdays, which was strange to me. We lived in an area called East Flatbush. It was a predominately Jewish area at the time, which the Jewish doctors and dentists were selling out and moving to South Florida. You guys know that well. So, the Caribbean folks were moving into that area. My dad, he just sort of disappeared. He came back to New York, came back home, and my mom was stressed out, obviously, having to carry a household of four for the most part by herself. He stayed for maybe about six months, eight months. This guy was an interesting fella. He didn't do any drugs. He wasn't an alcoholic. He loved betting. He loved gambling. He loved racetracks, and that was his vice. That was his liquor. That was his thing.

He came back and he would sort of dip into the pocket and he would go to ... I don't know if you guys ever remembered OTB, and he would go into OTB. The only place he took me to was OTB. So, I'm sitting there and there's different horses he's betting on, and that's pretty much what his thing was. He gambled to the degree that we almost lost everything. Literally, my mom had to sit down with me and my sisters, and I'll never forget this as long as I live, I had to be 10, 11 years old and she said, "Listen, if this man doesn't leave this house we're going to be living on the street, because we're done." He had gambled off the Subaru money that she had a Subaru and he gambled that off, and so on.

We had to, literally, unfortunately do a coup d'état on Dad. He wasn't checked in. He wasn't too happy about that, came home, the locks were changed. He decided to go his way, and I would not hear from Dad for another 30 years. I hadn't been affirmed by my dad. I hadn't been affirmed by much of anybody at that time. There was an interesting situation happening in Brooklyn, and probably in a lot of inner cities. We're talking 1980, 1981. They said I was a smart kid. I guess I might have been. I skipped two grades and I was getting courted by some boarding schools. I wanted to hang out with the rough crowd, you know the rough kids, because those were the guys I identified with. Those were the guys that were men. They were tough. Thanks be to God that my mom was a man and a woman inside. She was a very tough woman.

The school that was local to us was a school called Tilden High School. How many of you ever seen The Lords of Flatbush from back in the day? Remember that movie? So, that was the school and all the tough guys went there and I told my mom, "If I go there I'll be a Valedictorian. All these guys are not nearly as smart." She said, "You're not going there okay. You're going to die." She made me take an exam and I went to this high school that was an engineering high school. Right around that same time, around 12 years old I would say because I got in there, into this engineering high school to study aeronautical engineering. Didn't really want to go but my mom would have killed me so I had to go.

It so happened that there was an engineering program that was being released upon the nation at that time that I was unaware of. I believe it was diabolical. I believe it was from Satan himself. I've come up with some acronymal names. It's not been vetted so don't take it out of here and run with it. But, I think it came from his National Engineering Institute, Satan that is, and it call it PEP, or PEPPER. The Pharmaceuticae Entrepreneurship Program for Young Urban Men. What it was was a program that was geared towards fatherless homes, homes like mine, homes where at one point in time in the '70s there was, in the urban community there was a 30% single-parent household, 30% of the households had single parents.

But, right around '81, '82, with the introduction of this engineering program of basically drug dealing, as you can look at this antiquated chart which really is ... They call it the most embarrassing chart in America. It's an antiquated chart. It's obsolete. The numbers are actually greater than that, but you see that when this program was entered into, at the same time as I was going to high school, you saw those who were conducting transactions in that industry they went to jail in 1000% proportion between 1980 and 1990. We're talking about 80-90% of that red line going up were African-American men and Latino men, largely from fatherless households.

I had friends of mine, they were brilliant guys, who decided ... They were getting invited to go to Princeton, Harvard, Yale, you name it, but they decided, "You know what, I'm being offered an opportunity to go up the block, set up a system, have my own business right now, take care of my mom, take care of my family, make maybe 10 grand a week. However, what they didn't know in the contract was that clearly it could be short lived.

I had one man, I was 13. I needed money really badly and my mom warned me about going up the block. She would kill me before anybody else would, right. So, I went into a room of this size and it was a business seminar, and there were about 100 people in the room, and I was the youngest guy. It was, basically, a door-to-door salesman, electronic salesman, job and anybody could really get the job. There was a white guy, and a black guy. They were owners together. That was the first time I'd ever seen something of that magnitude, two guys from two different completely cultural backgrounds but they were partners, and that was a great thing for me to see.

I will never forget. I'm 13, I'm going into the school. My friends are deciding not to go to college. They're deciding to do different things and run behind this entrepreneurship program which was deadly and fatal. This guy makes me stand up in the room and he says, "Who are you? You're 13 years ... "How old are you?" I said, "I'm 13." He says, "You're the youngest guy in here. What's your name?" I said, "Sheldon Wilson." He looks at me and he points his finger at me in front of everybody and says, "You're going to be so successful and no matter what you do, no matter what you do you're going to bounce right back." I can't remember the rest of what he said because he electrified me with an affirmation that I had never heard from anyone in my household, or in my community. I walked out of there on clouds, knocked on a bunch of people's doors. Nobody bought anything from me, but that was okay, because this guy had told me it was going to change one day.

The next time I would get affirmed would be almost 10 years later. You got to understand something, I'm talking about fatherless homes. I'm talking about you, basically, having to glean from examples all around you. These examples I'm going to come up with some acronyms for you, but many of the examples that, basically, stepped into the community and stepped into these homes are what I call counterfeit spiritual fathers or CSFs. These were guys that essentially came in to affirm you, "Yeah, you're a man but you need to be doing these type of activities," which are seditious, that are unlawful, that will lead you down a pathway of generational cycles. We'll go into that a little bit further.

I want to just kind of show you what started happening. This is, again ... Please, just look at the bar. It's an old chart. I don't even think they want to put the new chart up yet, because it's just that embarrassing. But, between 1980 and 1990, during this rampant drug infestation that was ruining, particularly, a lot of homes that I came from, homes like mine, fathers were exiting and, basically, 70% of the households in the urban cities did not have fathers.

In those homes they were being replaced by God only knows. These young fellas, like myself, were not being affirmed by godly role models like you guys, and I know none of you may have come from these type of environments. I pray you haven't. What it did was it set in course, it set into motion, a fear, a distrust, a lack of what I call intrinsic fiduciary value systems. You see, when you have a father in the house, even if the father's mentoring you and he's telling you, "Son, you're not going to run the business for another 30 years," however, you're going to go head inside, you're going to be janitorial services, you're going to be washing pots, you're going to be sealing the pavement."

The son gets up in the middle of the night and he goes to the refrigerator and he knows that there's going to be food in the fridge that his father stocked there. He's getting ready to go to school, the father goes ahead. He's got clothes, he's got a pair of jeans, he's got a pair of sneakers on. The father provided that. There is this fiduciary that the biological father that's in the house gives the son, so he knows he can trust the father later on. That translates later on into his Christian experience where he's able to trust spiritual fathers. But, the son who

did not have strong biological fatherhood in him, strong impartation, strong affirmation, forgive me for this, he's most likely inclined to not trust the system later on.

So, let me move forward a little bit. You see, the plan of the enemy, and why we're struggling today in the church, and why more men, in my opinion, are leaving the church in droves, is because they come out of these disenfranchised, mistrusting environments, they run to the church looking for spiritual fatherhood. Whether you're 20 or 60 you still feel like if you didn't have a great biological father, even if you did, you're looking for affirmation from another strong male figure. The decoy outside the church, and in a lot of times, and I know none of you guys have experienced this. I know I'm talking to myself here, I hope I am. But, there are counterfeit tiers set up to, unfortunately, to hinder the growth of the sons. We see this with David.

We saw this with Saul. I call it the Sauline spirit. You guys know Saul, remember him. Saul was a guy that was anointed to be king. Saul was a guy that was a good-looking guy, tall guy. He stood above everybody. He had a son. He had some daughters. He had a prophesy. He could pray. But, when David came around by that time he was being tormented by a spirit of insecurity. Just say "insecurity," with me.

You cannot have a spiritual father who's insecure, and he was insecure. He was stubborn. He was fearful. You know we all know this, whatever you tend to guard and keep you can actually adapt those attributes that you guard and you keep. We know that David was a keeper of sheep so sheep like to have comrades like this. They are fierce in defending one another. They're protecting of one another. But, we learned that Saul was a chaser and a keeper of donkeys. Interesting. They say that you could be stubborn as a mule. Our guy, Saul, he had an issue with other people's capacity statements.

What ends up happening a lot of times, and this is what's happening with a lot of the young people that have come out of the world, escaped the vicissitudes of the unfortunate 80s and 90s, is when they got into the church they ended up finding themselves running from unfortunate situations in the church, men that were not receiving them, men that were looking like Saul looking at David, who came from a questionable background, by the way. That's why he was also overlooked by his own biological father, and you can look and read about that. Some of you already know that. As a result of that they find themselves in this spiraling situation.

Throughout my personal life I was grateful for what I call surrogate fathers. It's not up here, but a surrogate father was someone who may not have even been a spiritual guy. He may not have had a Christian verse of scripture to give me. He was planted in my life to, basically, shake me up, remind me to get yourself together. Everything's going to be all right, and he put me back on focus. That's what happened to me and how once I got out of college, I was invited to work on Wall Street by one of my Jewish friends, and he saw me as a spiritual son. He

had no scripture verse for me. He wasn't like he was a Messianic Jew, or anything like that. But, he implanted and supplanted some guidelines in my life. I'm sure many of you have had surrogate fathers.

I believe that surrogate fathers are sent by God. I believe that they're sent to reposition you, and to promote you, and to remind you, and to reaffirm you, and to validate you that everything's going to be all right. So, I had that term surrogate father, counterfeit spiritual father, and then what I also discovered is that when I got saved, and I got saved in 1994, 1995. If you don't mind I'll just tell you my story. Please don't go outside and tell it. I'll have to kill you if I hear you telling about it. But, I was finding myself in desperate need for fatherhood and for affirmation. I was doing pretty well. I had moved out of Brooklyn. I was now moving into my second firm of management, and Brett mentioned a firm that I belonged to that I had a small partnership in that, unfortunately, went down in the Trade Center. I'll get back to that in a second.

This is the 90s now and I'm supposed to be healed from the vicissitudes of Brooklyn and this whole trappings that you saw there on the bar chart, but yet I'm desperately feeling like I'm still not affirmed. Cars weren't doing anything for me, and my wife wasn't enough. The children were great. I thought I was breaking generational cycles. I actually started feeling like finally I was going to do something that no one else had done in my family line, but I felt empty. I couldn't understand why no one had really given me that "atta-boy," that every one of us needs every now and then. When I got into the church I believe like many of us who came out of the world we were looking for that atta-boy. We were looking to talk a little bit about what God delivered us from and what He saved us from, and where we came from. But, what I discovered really scared me. I began to see what I thought were spiritual fathers but they ...

Again, this is not applicable to anybody here in this room. I know you guys have come from some really solid churches and some solid backgrounds, and people have poured into you, but I'm talking about the remnant, like myself. I'm talking about guys who escaped some things, ran to the church, and now they love God and despise the church, and are not going there. On a Sunday the wives are going and they're sitting back watching games. I'm representing a little bit of those guys. What I could not for the life of me understand was that while I was searching, and I'm going to say a joke that Brett and I had a conversation about. I don't know if you remember SNL way back in the day and Eddie Murphy. He used to give some of the greatest skits. He did this Buckwheat skit. Remember that?

He'd say, "Lookin' Pa Nub in all da wong paces." Looking Pa Nub," right. Brett and I were having a cigar and I was like, "Brett, you know I find that the men that I'm talking to that have gross similarities like me are looking Pa Nub in all the wrong places, looking Pa Nub. I was meeting guys who were looking Pa Nub on websites, for affirmation, brothels for affirmation, and some of these guys were making so much good money that they were flying out to other proverbial businesses to looking Pa Nub, and they were still dying from with inside

themselves. They had escaped. They had become older but they hadn't become spiritually mature. They didn't have real mentors that were authentic, real mentors that could tell them the story that way it needs to be told, mentors that could remind them, "Hey, man, look, just in case you thought your story was bad, let's sign this nondisclosure and let me tell you what I really went through."

I began to start ministering to men, men on Wall Street, affluent men throughout the country who, by the way, didn't know that Sheldon was black, because 90% of my clients didn't know who I was. They thought I was this good Jewish guy named Sheldon. They'd say, "Sheldon, I understand but the Wilson part I don't get that." I'd say, "Don't worry about it." We'd send out tracts to these guys and minister to them about ...

What I discovered, guys, was as I was panting for years into my salvation walk, and looking for this real designated spiritual father that might be out there, that just like Joseph when Joseph was elevated to serve Pharaoh, and he was in the court of Pharaoh and he was sort of designing a plan to save the nation, something he had learned while he was in prison, he learned austerity measures in prison. He brought it right back to the palace. He, the Bible says, when it all was said and done, he became a father to Pharaoh. He became what I call a treasured father.

A treasured spiritual father ... Some of you have had them all your life. Some of you have just recently maybe walked into some of a treasured spiritual father. But, a treasured spiritual father is someone who doesn't really want anything from you. He just wants to see you blessed. He just wants to walk into your life, affirm you, ask you how you're making out, what are you doing, what do you need? He's like a T-bill. You know, you got a good T-bill it gives you a nice dividend check every quarter with no taxes. That's a great spiritual father.

I believe that in the body of Christ today, and I've left some examples up there, that we're in more need of treasured spiritual fathers. Some of us became treasured spiritual fathers and we didn't know it, because we were betrayed, we were overlooked so long that all we wanted to do was encourage the discouraged, and that's what I tend to do. I tend to encourage those who are discouraged. But, some of us have had treasured spiritual fathers and then we hoard the dividend check and we don't share it. What I have also discovered is that there are three things to this affirmation thing that really blue chip you and allow you to be used of God to encourage men. I'll say that and I'll get out of your way.

One, everybody goes to church for affirmation. Let's just point blank say it. If you go to church and nobody pays you any attention, and you give a check and nobody thanks you on the way out, when you get home and the wife says, "How was the church?" "I don't know about that place. Nobody said anything to me. Nobody said, 'Hello.' I went two or three times, they barely recognized me. Nobody remembered my name." Church should be like Cheers, you know, when

you show up, "Hey, Al," and everybody knows what? Your name. When you are affirmed in the house of the Lord as a man who is probably seeking for affirmation from another man, you gain value. There's nothing like coming to Man in the Mirror, have some donuts, some coffee, throw a couple dollars in there, and people just affirm you, affirm you to the point where you feel valuable. That's what I believe many of these church systems today may be lacking, which is why men are being lost in the church today.

Once you get affirmed and you get value, you give back the gift of loyalty. Loyalty is not a commodity, it's not a currency. Loyalty, if it was that it could be traded, or it could be bought, it could be stolen. Loyalty is a gift. Loyalty is that son, that spiritual son giving back the gift of loyalty and saying, "You've earned it. Here's equity back to you. I trust you with my heart. I know that I can call you at any given time at night and you're going to pick up the phone and you're going to keep me from some things." We have to develop brand loyalty in the House of God amongst the men. We have to be able to impart that loyalty by way of reciprocal investment into the sons, because whether you guys in this room have been spiritual sons, and you've matured into spiritual fathers, or not, God is always going to put you around spiritual sons who need an impartation. Amen?

I had a guy come to my house two years ago who used to work on some cable stuff. He started his own little cable company. He was fledgling. He came to the house to do some wiring and he was complaining to me about how he was going in and out of jobs, and he's really disappointed that he's not able to buy this house for his wife. I was kind of like on the phone and busy and I was like, "Don't worry about it. God's got you. Listen, you're going to be just fine. What are you doing now?" He says, "I'm selling Direct TV at Sam's Club." I said, "You know what, I'll come to Sam's Club and I'll buy Direct TV from you. All right, enough is enough. You're a man, be quiet."

I go to Sam's Club to follow up on my word and I can't find the guy. One of the workers say, "You know what, he didn't come to work today." I said, "All right I'm gon ..." He name was Brett, by the way, okay. I decided, All right, I'll come back. I ended up buying direct TV from somebody else, and then two weeks go by and I don't even know why I'm even thinking about this guy like that, but I cannot sleep, and I'm tossing and turning, and I wake up and I say, I can't ..." I call the guy, his phone's going straight to voicemail. I remembered that he had a business partner named Christian, and I remembered vaguely, and this was the Lord all the way stirring me up, stirring me up. He's got me doing this search and discovery to try to find this guy.

I finally found his company, his little new start-up company on the white pages and I called the number and his business partner picks up and I go, "Dude, I've been trying to find Brett for the last two or three weeks. Strangely enough I can't find the guy." He says, "Shel, you didn't hear what happened?" I said, "No." He said, "The guy left your house, he went to his house, called his wife, told her don't come home and he put a gun in his mouth and took himself out."

I wept for weeks because I wasn't paying attention to the signals, my brothers. I was busy and busy, and this guy was bleeding and hemorrhaging, and I was giving him a Band-Aid for what was going to be a bullet wound.

We have to do better at being treasured spiritual fathers. We have to step our game up. We're losing our men. I believe the numbers are through the roof now in terms of pastors committing suicide, because they were either never affirmed, and they were never shown value, and there was no loyalty given to them in the House of God. There's no way we should escape the vicissitudes of whatever we all came from here, we all came from something, to go to the House of the Lord and be rejected because we don't look the same. When that event occurred in my life I made a decision, a conscious decision, to engage in every man and look him in his eye and for God to give me discernment to see what he's going through and to pray, and to intercede, and to communicate with him, and to pray. With that, I know you guys won't have me back. I love you anyway the same, but I think my time is up. God bless you all. Thank you.

Brett Clemmer:

Thank you, Sheldon. Hey let me ... I'm going to pray and then we'll take some questions from the guys, okay?

So, let me pray for us. Father, wow what a powerful morning. Lord, what a voice for the power of fathering, for the need for affirmation, for the cycle that you set up in a man's life and heart that the affirmation of a father leads to a man feeling valued, and that leads then to him feeling a sense of belonging and loyalty and brotherhood, Lord, that then leads to him being able to affirm the next guy that comes along. Lord, would you use that in our hearts. Would you help us to pay attention. Would you help us to look another man in the eye and ask him how he's really doing. Lord, just show real interest, the interest of a most treasured son who wants to then pass on the love that he's received from his father onto the next guy. Father, use us for that we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.