

Introduction

We heartily welcome you to this course. We honor you for stepping into this in the way you have. We are, for these sessions, privileged to be part of your lives, your families. Now why would we say that? Are we just trying to be nice? No way! Here is the truth. What is going on in your home, your families, your relationships to each other and with your children, along with your communications with each other, your attitudes and actions, affects the larger community, including our churches. Does not the strength and vitality of any congregation depend largely on what is going on in the families of the congregation? The family is the basic building block for human life on this planet.

Now, for whatever reason, both society and many churches have almost forgotten about what is going on in our homes. This is a mystery we need to address. Are we assuming all is well in our homes and families even though we are for the most part overlooking their primary role in our country? Within a family, is there a leader who understands their calling from God--how to lead their family? How do family leaders be the people we need them to be, when there is little training and when no one is holding them accountable?

Although, our pastors, church leaders and church buildings are important, aren't family leaders even more so? After all, family leaders are with their family members on a day to day basis witnessing the accomplishments and life's challenges each family member faces. They have the opportunities to coach, guide, counsel, set limits, warn and build up their children for all that life will bring into their lives. What you are living out in your families is the bedrock of our country and the very root system of our congregations. And we know a tree doesn't grow unless it has roots supplying the sap and holding it firmly in place.

As you take this course, you are going to discover afresh just how key you are to the strength of our country, to the vitality of our churches, but most of all to the lives of your children, your grandchildren and your godchildren. So God has blessed you with the great callings you have and watching with you at the great challenges you face. And here is the good news. When God calls a person to carry out a certain calling, God will provide that person what he or she needs to fulfill that calling. God is on our side and an active partner.

Discussion Questions: *Consider the idea that you are the bedrock of our society, the very root system of your congregation. What would you say that means? Discuss and then ask: Have you ever thought of yourselves that way? If what we are saying here is true, how appropriate is it that you have some training to be prepared so you can keep growing in your calling? Isn't it vital that you have the opportunity to grow fully into the great calling you have, preparing for the staggering challenges you face? What can happen so you can further accomplish what you see needs to happen? Talk about the value of training as you see it.*

The War Against Parents by Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornell West: 1998. "We begin by asking the central question: why are hundreds of thousands of American children dangling and dangerous and millions more failing to thrive? It is a fact that too many children are being born without a skin—with



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none of the protective armor that in the past was provided by parents and communities. We demonstrate that at the heart of our children's plight is a truly frightening erosion of the parental role—the ability of moms and dads to come through for their children. This is happening not because parents are less devoted than they used to be. They do not love their children less. The truth is, the whole world is pitted against them. One of the best-kept secrets of the last thirty years is that big business, government and the wider culture have waged a silent war against parents, undermining the work that they do. Some of the hostility has been inadvertent, and some has been deliberate. But whatever forces are responsible for the war against parents, one thing is for sure: parents have been left twisting in the wind by a society intent on other agendas.”

Discussion Questions: *In this course we are beginning to talk about protective armor provided by family leaders. Hewlett and West say kids are growing up today without a skin. How do you think that is true or not true? In your estimation, what has changed in our society that has people talking little about parenting or grandparenting and the major role these family leaders have in making a society and church thrive? In other words what is going on that has put family leaders in the back seat? How can that be changed?*

Hewlett and West talk about parents twisting in the wind. When we focus on redwood trees, we discover their roots do not go deep but they stretch out horizontally and intertwine their roots with the roots of other redwood trees. This has given them the capacity to deal with all kinds of weather and live for thousands of years. Intertwining their roots with each other, stabilizes and nourishes each other. A redwood can live up to 2,200 years and grow to be as much as 350 feet high. Many city blocks are only 300 feet in length. Redwood's bark resist fire and the wood resist rot. That is why 95% of redwoods have been cut down for lumber with only 5 % remaining.

Discussion Questions: *What can we family leaders learn from redwoods? What do redwoods tell us about the value of being in a group instead of trying to solve all our family problems by ourselves? How important is it to you that your offspring endure all kinds of attacks and remain whole? What would that take?*

Did you know? Trees can actually communicate with each other. They emit a chemical into the air to warn the other trees that they are about to be infested with insects. They can actually combat leaf eating insects by some of the chemicals they produce. Some wildlife are keen to this chemical that attracts them to come feast on the pests that infest.

Trees are also able to talk to each other through an underground network; kind of like the internet via the soil where they share nutrients. Fungi that rest on the roots assist trees' communication by linking each tree to one another. Who knew that trees emit excess carbon to young seedlings to strengthen their survival?

So, you see some facts about trees are simply incredible and a forest will grow, survive, revive and show us that we must turn around and see the trees individually and the forest collectively.

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Psalm 144:12 Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace.

Paul Tournier, Christian physician and counselor “The ideal place for the child is the family. When the family is such that the child cannot fit himself into it properly, he looks elsewhere for some other place, leading to a wandering existence, incapable of settling down anywhere. His tragedy is that he carries about within himself this fundamental incapacity for any real attachment. The child who has been able to grow up harmoniously in a healthy home finds welcome everywhere. In infancy, all he needs is a stick placed between two chairs to make himself house, in which he feels quite at home. Later on, wherever he goes, he will be able to make any place his own, without any effort on his part. For him it will not be a matter of seeking, but of choosing.”

Discussion Questions: *If trees thrive by communication with each other, how important do you think it is that kids and their family leaders communicate with each other? Can you think of any examples of what good communication might look like? What elements do you see need to be there to have a son grow up to be like a well-nurtured plant? To have a daughter be like a pillar carved to adorn a palace? Discuss the ideas Paul Tournier is proposing. In your experience what do you see as you look around you? Is he helping the way it is with a child or is he misleading us? Talk about it.*

God expects much from us as parents. We have been given much. “To whom much has been given, much is required,” said Jesus. (Luke 12:48b) When we are faithful receivers, lovers and worshippers of God in Jesus Christ, we become our children’s chief protectors and teachers. We have first place in their lives for God has privileged us to become front line guides and instructors. Ours is a singular and unique place in the lives of our children. We are the only ones to raise them, to pass on the faith to them, to instill in them what life is all about, to equip them with the wise skills to fend off evil.

Consider these questions: *Do you see yourself as having drawn on your full ability to be a family leader? What could be a growth area for you? Research show that from 1960 to 2000 the most impactful influence on the lives of American children has drastically changed. In 1960 family life was the key influence, then peers and friends, then school and fourthly church. By 2000 this had shifted, and now media was the main influence, then peers and friends, then family and then school. Do these statistics square with what you see around you? Have we drifted further since 2000 or reversed this trend back to having the home influence be more important now than it was?*

Closing prayer suggestions: **For God to help us come to terms with how important we are in the lives of the youth we care about. Thanking God for this group and asking for the Holy Spirit to be present and help us become members who are good for each other. God enabling us individually to break out of whatever passivity that has caught up to use and become more intentional in giving the leadership we have been assigned.**