

## **Fathers, The Challenges They Face**

### **Purpose:**

- 1. To lift up and emphasize the importance of good fathering.**
- 2. To show how vital a father can be as to how his children turn out.**
- 3. To underscore the challenges a father faces and the Holy Spirit's help to meet those challenges.**
- 4. To recognize the amazing gift of being a father.**

**When my third daughter was a victim of a human trafficker in 1987, it never struck me that I had anything to do with it. I believed the trafficker was clever, set her up and she fell for it. That is the way I saw it. I left it at that. Of course, I was heartbroken, and I felt helpless. Someone else had control of her. But here is the reality that is hard to face - I did not prepare her to deal with the wolves she would meet out there. I went along with our cultural belief which tells us that bad things won't happen to good kids. One's kids will not get into trouble if the parents are functioning well, right? All of this leads to the question - what is the father's role, anyway?**

**The word PREPARATION has not been emphasized in most of our families. When the crash of one of our beloved youths ends at the bottom of a cliff, then we wake up. General MacArthur of World War II fame said the reason for defeat can be summed up in two words: Too Late! That means the army was not fully ready and prepared to fight the battle when it was actually fought. This is what happened to my daughter. And it points back to me and what I failed to do. Now when I look back, I see that nobody was talking about this calling I had as a father. I surely was just doing what I thought a father should do. That meant I wasn't thinking that much about what it means to be a father. I wasn't looking into resources that would help me be a better, wiser father. So, being a father for me was something I would do just like my father did. No extra preparation! No compelling concern for preparing my kids for the world they would face!**

**Not that I was a bad father. I was just an average father. Unfortunately, that was not good enough. As we learned in lesson one, even if we sincerely love our kids, there is a war against parents. We are fighting a battle on two fronts. There is a lack of emphasis on supporting and valuing parents more than other pressing priorities. The reality is that our kids are growing up without skin, more vulnerable than they need to be. That means in our world today, the challenge of being the father we need to be, has become much greater. There is nothing telling us all the new technology created in the last decades is going to disappear. Instead, the influence on all of us, especially our young ones, is bound to become greater. People who want to make money will make sure that cell phones, texting, email, and social media will become all the more advanced and appealing. What a challenge this presents. The average parent is doing well if he or she is only in third place as an influencer of their child. Social media, regular media, peers, and friends all have an enormous impact on the average American child. In most cases, they have more impact on the thinking and attitudes of a teenager than do the parents.**



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*Discussion Questions: From your experience or learning, how challenging is it to raise a child in today's world? What do those challenges look like? What do you see are some of the factors involved in preparing a child to be able to deal successfully with all that is coming at them? Are fathers finding strong support for what they are doing in order to be victorious over their competition?*

What is going on with kids in this generation that could say to a father (or a mother) that they are losing out and there is nothing they can do about it? It has taken me a long time, but I have come to see that there is real hope. God has not forgotten about us and the great calling we have as parents and especially as fathers. Someone said that if God gives a person a calling, God also provides all that is needed to fulfill that calling. This is what I have come to see. This is what this curriculum is about—to focus on what family leaders have at their disposal, to give them a clearer sense of direction, to help them see what they are faced with, and to promote discussions where family leaders can learn from each other. This curriculum seeks to bring to the attention of family leaders what God has provided in His Word. Also, we have the understanding and tools that different-thinking and experienced authors have given us to use for equipping our offspring to be full of faith, to be wise, and safe. When all that happens, we will be giving a great gift to those we care about and to the next generation.

We can learn a lot from Jesus and Paul as to how to be a father. They fathered disciples, co-workers, lay people, and members of churches. But they were not married and had no children of their own. The best example I have found in the Bible of who was an effective father figure is Mordecai in the book of Esther. He adopted Esther, a relative, and raised her. Here is what we find with him. He bonded with her early. Then he raised her to be thoughtful, caring, trusting, knowing God, wholesome, winsome, respectful of Mordecai, and street smart. On the other hand, Mordecai himself was devoted to Esther, kept track of her circumstances, dealt with danger, recognized harm, and had a close enough relationship with Esther so he could challenge her with tough requests. He found just the right words to call her up to give risky leadership. He also listened, honored, and obeyed her when she courageously took a life-threatening step forward. All of this gives us pause and reason to seek to be a Mordecai kind of father ourselves. (Read Esther).

*Discussion Question: When you hear about Mordecai and who he was as a father, what strikes you about him that might help us be better fathers? Considering what family leaders are faced with today, how valuable is it to be able to learn from others and share in a course like this? How much intention and effort does it take to be the father our kids and our grandkids need us to be?*

Is there any time in a man's life when he takes on more risk, more responsibility, the most life-changing experience, or the greatest possibility of having a monumental high calling than when he has sex with a woman? In front of him, barring a foolproof birth control method, is the possibility of human life being conceived. If a child is conceived, what does that mean for this man who is now a co-creator of a child, through God, with a woman? Both stand before God, having become responsible stewards as God's representatives on this earth not only for the raising of this child, but to some extent for all that goes on in that child's life. This could involve many heart-wrenching things such as major health problems, mental issues, molestation, chemical addiction, porn



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addiction, suicide, criminal activity, etc. It could also involve disobedience, discipline issues, sleepless nights, challenging financial concerns, misunderstandings, trauma, and worries, just to name a few. God has given parents the authority to deal with these daunting situations.

Fathers can often find themselves in the trenches in many varied situations. We dare not underestimate the challenges fathers confront. When Martin Luther says: “Most certainly father and mother are apostles, bishops and priests to their children, if they make them acquainted with the gospel. In short, there is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal,” is he not saying two things? First, being a father is as heavy a responsibility as it is to be a bishop, an apostle, or a priest. Bishops go through much prior training. Do not fathers need to be trained and equipped for their high calling? Is this not why you are in this course? Secondly, as with a bishop, apostle, or priest, is not God inside this calling, so that carrying out what God in Christ wants, can only be done by the work of the Holy Spirit through a father? God has not forgotten fathers. Rather, God is with every father and gives him strength, grace, wisdom, and courage.

*Discussion Questions: In relation to a child, what can be particularly challenging for a parent? Where do you see heartache and/or discouragement happening as parents raise a child? What does it take for a father to be up for all these kinds of challenges? How do you connect parenting with the presence of the Holy Spirit? How do you connect the Holy Spirit with parenting?*

We dare not overlook the bright side. A child is such a gift to behold. Each is different and each has its own charm, although with some it takes time for that to come through. Once in a while, we need to stand back and give ourselves time to notice: the difference that loving them makes, to witness their stages of growth, and to behold how their personalities are developing. How are they responding to our parenting, and if they are teenagers, are they starting to establish some independence? What skills and interests do they have? Are they showing signs of being trustworthy and are there changes in their maturity level? And we don't want to forget the fun and meaning they are giving to the lives of us parents. Fathers can discover more of who they are as they relate to a child. There is probably no greater human joy on this earth than to have one's child do well. This may take a long time in coming. David Walsh tells of his 28-year-old son coming to him and thanking him for holding the line when he was fifteen; when he was not thinking of the troubles he was about to get into.

*Discussion Question: In what ways has a child made your day or given you more energy for life? Name one thing you have appreciated about one of your children. In the long run, what can make it all worthwhile?*

As Christians, it is possible we are missing out on one of life's greatest challenges and adventures—that of passing on the faith to our children. No, it is not the pastor's job nor is it the Sunday School teacher's job. As we learned in Session 6, the Bible clearly lays out that a child is to be taught by family leaders, and their faith is to be caught from family leaders. This is simply the way life works. A great mistake has been made in many sermons, including ones I preached, that witnessing for Christ is supposed to happen 'out there' someplace, with one's neighbors or at one's workplace.



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Talking that way, we often skip over the obvious—we are to teach and share with our own children, and in the process begin to get in touch with more of God’s truth for ourselves. So, if we do share with someone else, we know what we’re talking about.

We must start in our own families, our own homes. Yes, we might be fairly shallow Christians and know little of the Bible. Welcome to Club Ignorance! We have many members. We might see ourselves as very inarticulate when it comes to talking about our faith. In spite of that, we who are parents and grandparents are the ones who are to pass on the faith. That means us fathers and grandfathers too. We are the ones to witness to our own offspring, to share Bible stories and talk about them. We are the ones who can pray for our kids and teach them to pray. All this is good for us family leaders. This is basically how the church is to operate. We are assigned to prepare our young people for the lives they will live. That includes the people who they will be for their spouses and children.

*Discussion Questions: Why has God given the job to family leaders to pass on the faith? What makes this a surprising mandate? Is this a good idea on God’s part? Embarrassing as it might be to ask; if we are realistic about what is happening, where are we at in taking on all of this?*

The Bible clearly understands fathers need to be given a pep talk. In the last verse of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:6, and in the first chapter of Luke verse 17, we find the same thought. The heart of a father is to turn to his children. Mothers are more likely to be bonded with their children. They physically birthed them. Fathers need to be more motivated and intentional in creating relationships with their children. This is the strong foundation that will keep their children solid and safer.

If this is the design God has created for human life to be lived: first husband and wife then parents and children, then home life is vitally important. This brings us to God’s calling for father and mother – to pass on God’s good news, God’s commandments, God’s love and blessing, God’s wisdom, and all kinds of teachings, to the next generation. All of this is what makes Ephesians 6:4 so crucial. (Look it up and read it). Fathers are to carry out God’s assignment to them. There is a monumental need for a godly relationship between parents and children that empowers peace, patience, knowledge, growth, interaction and being armed to defend oneself.

In relationships where bonds are built, where key communication of God’s Word and the passing on of wisdom to follow God’s message is happening, what does this do? It helps the child to stay faithful, learn to be wise, and be ready to face the evildoers and dangers that will surely be there. Is not this the reason Ephesians 6:4 exhorts fathers (and mothers) to not be emotionally reactive to children, alienating them and making it hard for them to receive what God wants to give them through their parents? Reactive anger can do much to destroy a relationship. Is this not why we have James 1:19-20, “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”



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If the father can listen and share in a gentle manner, then the child will have the wherewithal to give healthy and discerning leadership in his or her future marriage and family. Mothers surely have a vital role in all this. In this session, we are focusing on fathers. One reason for this is the focus and attentiveness fathers are to provide to their children. When we think about this, we ask: How is a child expected to make vital decisions that will deeply affect their lives if the father has indicated in some offhand way that the child's well-being or maturing is not that important to him? We must understand that children quickly pick up on attitudes, broken promises, and permissive cowardliness.

Fathers are to "Man-up", to carry the load even when it's heavy. Fathers might have to overcome the lack of support and attention given to them. Their call is to stick in there boldly, carrying out the decisive and critical race fathers have to run all the way to the finish line. Don't bank on our culture nor our congregations to lift up and key in on what a father must provide for his children. If a Christian father faithfully fulfills his calling, what a gift that will be for his descendants and so many others, including the well-being of our country and world.

*Discussion Question: If we dare face reality, what difference does it make on the one hand reacting and screaming at our child, and on the other hand staying calm and correcting them as one sinner to another? How difficult is it for most of us to keep our cool and pray for grace in dealing with a child, so they can actually hear what we are seeking to teach them? Have we come to terms with the reality that raising kids can at times be one of the toughest jobs we will ever have? How would you describe the calling of a father?*

Now take the Supplemental sheet: What Makes a Father Important in a Child's Life. Have the class read through it. This description can be overwhelming. Do any fathers live up to all this? Probably not. But this can provide a growing edge. Fathers and also grandfathers in the room: Pick out three of these statements that you are pretty good at. Then pick out two that you could improve upon—a frontier for growth.

*Discussion Questions: Feel free to share or not share what you come up with.*

**Clarence Budington Kelland** "He didn't tell me how to live; he lived, and let me watch him do it."

**Billy Graham** "A good father is one of the most unsung, unpraised, unnoticed, and yet one of the most valuable assets in our society."

Google: T.D. Jakes Video on Fatherhood, other videos as well

Summary:

1. Growing into the calling of being the father we need to be is an awesome journey.
2. Coming to terms with the value a father is in the lives of his children can open the door for the father to have a real growth experience.



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- 3. Realizing the great opportunity that we as men have to be a father to children cannot be overemphasized. And to fulfill that calling, we look to the Holy Spirit for love, patience, wisdom, and guidance.**
- 4. God has called fathers as the key people to protect, prepare and equip His children for the life, the world, and the schemers they will experience.**

### Prayer Suggestions:

- 1. Prayer for the Holy Spirit's work in the hearts of fathers so that they may be faithful and prepared in their callings.**
- 2. Awaken in the hearts of every father the awareness of the often-difficult challenges they have, and not face them alone but with the presence of the Holy Spirit.**
- 3. That as a church, we turn our attention to the great calling fathers in our congregation have, and find more ways and words to support them.**
- 4. To give our fathers a growing edge so they continue to mature in grace and wisdom in raising their children.**

End of Session Eight on Fathers

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