

Today it's probably no surprise that I want to talk specifically to dads. And I know for some of you men you might think it rules you out because you're not a dad, or that you're now more a grandfather and you think it doesn't apply to you anymore. Or maybe today you are a single parent, and you think it doesn't apply. But whether you have young children, children who are now adults, whether you are not a parent but actually you have contact with dads in your friendships, then this message is for all of you today.

And so today we are going to think about the influence of Godly men. And I suspect in this place today there are some of you that have had a dad who has wisely with love provided you with great support leading you towards God. But I also suspect that there are some of you, and that includes me, where you would rather forget the example that your father set you. Or maybe today you wish your children had a father around to provide a good example, but he's left the home. I really hope that somewhere along the way you have had the privilege of having a male figure with you at times throughout your life that has shown you Jesus in the way they have lived.

I believe today as God's people we need to claim back the image of men, men chosen by God as an example to their families, men who love their wives and children, men who walk with the Lord daily and model something incredibly healthy, men who bring their family to church rather than just the mothers.

I was trying to find statistics concerning the impact of families without fathers, and I found some striking data. But I've decided not to share it because it truly is scary what the neglect, absence or failings of a father can do to children emotionally and spiritually.

Clearly this is very sobering, but as someone who was brought up by my mother, I want to affirm all you mothers today who in the absence of a father to provide leadership, have for your children been that steady foundation. So thank you.

I think in any family, God has designed the roles of mother and father to serve in a complimentary fashion and together to reflect the nature of God. The mother's role is important, and the father's also, but as kids grow up, they will look to the Father for their role model in adopting values. And this is shown in lots of research. And so where the Father is indifferent or absent, the task of maturing as a child becomes more difficult. When it comes to church, I read an article from The Gospel Coalition that states if a father does not go to church, no matter how faithful his wife's devotions, only one child in 50 will come as a regular worshipper (that's 2%). Folks, those are statistics that families need to waken up to.

Folks I don't want to dishearten you today, but I want to acknowledge today how difficult it is as parents to be present when there's so many pressures that challenge us to spend time investing in our children, but I would also like to claim now that all of us can be the exception, and thank the Lord for the amount of young lives that are running about our 2 churches – that demonstrates families that care. You know that if both the father and mother attend church regularly, then that report that I spoke about says 74% of children will end up attending church one way or another – what a difference we all can make for

the Kingdom. So we need a generation of Godly men who understand the importance of being an influential godly person. Dads, the way in which we live our lives, the way we lead in our homes, will have a massive effect on our children and our marriages and our own lives, and today we will see how it will influence a future generation. This is so important for us all on this day as we celebrate Fathers.

So we are going to talk about being a Godly Father or Role Model, a passionate lover of God, and we are going to do this from Deuteronomy Chapter 6 with a couple of points.

LEAVING A LEGACY

So firstly, we are going to think about how a Godly Father leaves a legacy. As I think about my father, and as I think about my role as a father, I more and more realise that the way we live today has a generational affect. The way you serve God today will echo through the generations to come. Dads you are shaping your family tree for the decades ahead. When we come to Deut 6 Moses has come to the end of his life, and he is reminding the people of the last 40 years (that's a generation), and how God has brought them through everything. God is longing for the people to follow his ways, because he knows that if they follow, the next generation will follow also. Listen to what God says to Moses, Chapter 5:29 *"Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!"* You see men, if we have a heart for God and obey him, then there is a generational effect. It will affect my children, it will affect my grandchildren. When they see how I walk with the Lord, it will not go unnoticed. And so as I see the blessing of walking with the Lord, my children will see it also. God says that if you honour him, then He will bless you. Dads there is a legacy and a Godly blessing that you can leave your children. It is more valuable than what's in your will. It's more important than handing over your possessions to them. To know that my children walk close to the Lord as they follow my example is an incredible blessing.

And now as we look at these verses in Chapter 6, here's what is said *"These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life"*. Scripture says in Proverbs 9:11, *"For through wisdom [that's wisdom from God] your days will be many, and years will be added to your life"*. What happens is that when you live a Godly life and in a godly way then you make decisions that generally are good for you and naturally lead to longevity. And then in Deut 6:3, we read *"Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you"*. You see when a dad honours the Lord, scripture says that life will go well. Now I don't mean that we won't have problems, because we all will, but it does mean that our focus on the Lord helps us to understand his providence, his protection, his love. And as a result we become people who are so much more thankful for all that God does for us. So as a result of how we as fathers

approach things in life, our children turn their dependency on God and their gratitude to God becomes normal. That's the legacy that we pass on.

Men, your obedience to the Lord, or your lack of obedience, will determine what your children and grandchildren, or the children you have influence over, will know of God's working in their lives. You're either creating a legacy and blessing for them, or you are laying the groundwork of a life of spiritual hardship. And where today in your family the man isn't doing that, I would encourage women to find a godly male role model who can be that positive influence. So that's LEGACY.

The next thing that a Godly man does, is that HE LOVES GOD INTENSELY.

Let's look at verse 5 – “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*”. In order to train up Godly children, they have got to see parents who are completely in love with God. So Moses says “*Love the Lord with all your heart*”. A sincere heart. The truth is that our kids know that we are not perfect. But they want to know that you are sincere. They want to know that these things really matter to you, that you are not playing games. What children really want to see is that sincerity. Men, your children need to see that you are passionately, enthusiastically in love with God, that you love him more than anything or anyone else – that you are committed to him. Moses goes on to say “*with all your soul*”. For a Godly person, it will be obvious in what you spend your time, it's obvious in your speech, it's obvious in where you invest your money, that loving and serving God is a really big thing for you. So you want to model that for your children, not because you have to, but because you want to. So where is your heart and soul right now?

It's interesting at the minute the conversations that we are having at home. Josh our eldest boy sees the work ethic in Alison and I. In fact he sees us working night and day, and that is passing unto him which is not necessarily a good thing – he works hard at everything he does. He's got a research post for the summer that he's putting everything into. And whilst that might make some dads proud and it does, I will be honest that this doesn't matter. Actually I don't want him to work as hard as I do because it's draining. But what does my heart more good is to see how much of a sponge he is for the Lord. He wants to know more. I have desired all my life that my children would be passionate lovers of the Lord Jesus – that's all that matters. And over the years I have been with a lot of very successful people, a number of them who are millionaires, but they haven't that passion for the Lord. They think they've gained, and yet they've lost everything. Men stop pushing your children with all the academia, or all the achievements – spiritually speaking it counts for nothing – in the past week I helped a gentleman take out the 3 bags of possessions from hospital for a family member that died. And as we walked to the car, the thing that actually mattered more for him was that the person in that hospital bed had surrendered their life to the Lord Jesus. That's what truly matters, and that's what should matter to us for our children more than anything else. So men, do you love the Lord your God passionately? Women, do your husbands love the Lord? Make that your prayerful ambition every day that they may come

to the Lord, so that another God-loving generation may follow after them. SO LOVE GOD INTENSELY.

And now the final thing that a Godly man does, is that he LIVES WITH SPIRITUAL INTENTIONALITY

Verse 6&7 “*These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children*”. Here’s what it’s saying – as a parent, specifically as a dad, you and I have a responsibility to impress on our children, to make an imprint on the mind of our children, the commands of the Lord. Our children as they grow have to learn to process life, and they will either process it with a God-filled lens or a human lens. The word of God should become the plumbline that they measure everything in life against. So how do you do that as a Godly influencer?

Firstly we do it with conviction. It has to be important to you, otherwise it won’t happen. We do in our life what we think is important. We talk about things that we consider important to us . So is the Lord important to us? Remember those words from Matthew 6 “*for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*”. In other words, the time you give to investing in the spiritual life of your young person will be determined by how much it truly matters to you. Verse 6 Moses says “*These commands are to be on your hearts*”. If it’s not on your heart, then it will have very little impact on your children’s hearts. We’ve got to have it real to us first. You won’t be able to teach well about the things that are not passionate to you.

And then the second thing that we have to do is be consistent. Verse 6b -9 “*Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates*”. Thank goodness that our young people’s programmes in these churches are so focused on making future disciples for Jesus. I wonder did you realise that for all of our teens, once school finishes in the next 2 weeks, they are encouraged to go to Summer Madness, and then on to Street Reach, then there’s the Kilbroney camps that they can attend or lead at, then for those that are 15 and over there’s the mission team to Tarragona. Then there’s helping to lead at the Holiday Bible Club in August, and before they know it they’re back to school again having had a full summer programme. Folks, that’s not to give children things to do, that’s because we have leaders who love the Lord, and who want to sow into these children’s lives that they may come to know the Lord deeply – that’s consistency.

But as good as those programmes are, and the many things we do throughout the year, as a parent we err if we see the church and its programmes as the facility, the mechanism for having our children grow. The job of the church is simply to support you in raising godly children, it’s not the job of the church to be supported by you in raising Godly children. It’s got to first happen in the home. You’ve got to talk about it in the home, you’ve got to talk about it in the car, or wherever you are. So men, if the love of the Lord is not in your heart first, then don’t think it’s the job of the church to replace the role that you aren’t doing.

Men, make it your job to get yourself close to the Lord. You can't blame the church for your child's walk if you're not walking close.

So when you are around your children, and they are talking about things that are important to them, how are you steering that conversation towards the things of God? Are you telling your kids that you will pray for them over those matters? How much time are you giving to sit and talk with your children? And maybe for some of you as you are now older men, you realise those opportunities were missed. Well maybe there's grandchildren or great grandchildren where you still have the opportunity to sit and feed into their lives with the things of God.

Men, are you speaking life into your children today? How are you equipping them for whatever they are facing? What can you say that is important to them? For example, Josh remember that your name means you are a leader, so be an influencer to those around you today. Nathan, stand tall, be courageous today knowing that the Lord is with you wherever you go. And irrespective of whether you have a child whose 5 or a child today whose 45, do whatever you can to talk with them, to have a relationship with them, and to speak truth into their lives. Men, wherever it is, whenever it is, generate conversation about the Lord. Point them to the Lord who will walk with them.

Dads thank you for what you already are doing, but if you are not doing some of these, then you need to ask the Lord to help you incorporate these into your daily life. This life is more than just you, it's about the legacy that you are going to leave the kids that you have influence over. It's not about what's in your bank account or your assets that you leave behind. It's about you loving God from your heart, and it's about you leading your kids to follow in Godly footsteps. And when you do that they are going to be blessed, they are going to know the hand of God on their lives, because the hand of God was on your life. May that be your priority as a Dad, as a Granddad, as a Great Granddad, as a leader or influencer of the next generation. May God equip you on this Father Day as your shape those that will come after us.